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OR

*BRIEF ESSAYS*

ON

Obscure or Misread Scriptures. 2

BY THE REV.

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## PREFACE.

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“**A**N Expositor’s Note-book” met with a reception so generous and cordial that I now venture to publish what is virtually a second volume of it, although it appears under another name. The new name is a concession I owe to some of the ablest and kindest of my critics, who, while they commended the contents of the previous volume, pointed out that it was not of the nature of a Note-book, since, instead of giving brief expository suggestions, it was composed of “elaborate studies of difficult or misread Scriptures”; and that, therefore, the title was inaccurate and misleading. In deference to their verdict, the justice of which I acknowledge, I have given the present series of essays and discourses another, and I hope a more accurate, title. But, in substance, this second volume is very much what the first was. In this, as in that, I have selected “obscure, misread, or specially interesting passages from different parts of the Bible for explanation and comment.” In this too, as in that, I have collected “papers” which have already appeared in various periodicals, from the “Sunday Magazine” and “Good Words” to the “British Quarterly.”

In their notices of the former volume, more than one of

my critics—as, for example, the “Guardian” and the “Spectator”—remarked that it had “a special value for those who wished to do what we are sure the author would not object to—appropriate in an intelligent way for audiences of their own the substance of his thought and learning.” I can only thank my reviewers for the suggestion, and say that, if any of my brethren find that they can turn the contents whether of this or of the previous volume to use, I shall feel honoured by being permitted to be of service to them.

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# BIBLICAL EXPOSITIONS.

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## I.

### The Sceptical Pawn.

PSALM xiv. 1.

IT happened on a time that two friends, who had been playing chess together, quitted the board to talk over their last game at their ease before they parted for the night. While they were thus occupied, the following amazing conversation took place between the Black Bishop's Pawn and the White King, who, by the chances of the game, had been left standing on adjacent squares :—

Said the Pawn to the King: "I have heard, Sire, and indeed it is the common belief, that we Chessmen are ruled by a Superior Intelligence which controls our movements and directs them to a foreseen end. But that is all nonsense, is it not? and quite incredible to any rational Piece. For, as no doubt your Majesty has observed, we are all of us the mere creatures of law. An iron and inevitable necessity governs all our acts. Though each of us has a movement peculiar to himself, nevertheless that movement is strictly defined, so that we cannot overstep the limits of the rules by which we are severally governed. We Pawns move, and

can only move, straightforward, a single square at a time, except to take an opponent, and then we can only move on to the next square on either side. The Rook runs forward, or backward, or sideways, at his pleasure, but always in right lines, from which he cannot deviate. The Bishop sweeps across the board, at times very swiftly, but always and inevitably along the diagonals of his own colour. The Knight, indeed, seems more erratic than most of us, and the Queen more free; but after all, the Knight can only jump according to the law of his being, two steps forward and one to either side; and even our lady the Queen is only free to choose between the movements of the Rook and the Bishop; while your Majesty, as becomes your dignity, moves but seldom, and then slowly, and by single squares. In short, as I said at first, we are all the creatures of definite and invariable laws, and can only move each according to his own law; and it puzzles me, I confess, to understand how any observant Piece, with discourse of reason, should give in to the solemn nonsense one so often hears about a Superior Intelligence that uses us at its pleasure, and freely works out through us its own designs."

Now the King, who, like many other potentates, was somewhat slow and dull, and who, moreover, had a steady faith in the accepted traditions, was not a little surprised to hear the pert and garrulous Pawn break into a strain so sceptical and upsetting. But he *was* a king, and held himself bound, therefore, to treat even the humblest mortal with courtesy and consideration. So, after duly pondering what he had heard in his slow brain, he replied to the Pawn: "But what, on your theory, do you make of the strange sounds we sometimes hear from above, 'Ha, the old gambit!' 'Check!' 'Mate!' and so on? And, moreover, have you never felt yourself taken up in a warm strong grasp, and put where you had no thought of going? And, again, how

comes it to pass that, every time we play our several parts, although we move according to definite and unchangeable laws, we are variously combined, and run differently through our brief span to unlike ends? And finally, can you tell me, Pawn, who *made* us, and the board on which we move, and the laws by which we are ruled, and who it is that places us on the board in due order and rank, unless there be a Power above us and an Intelligence superior to our own?"

Thus the King thought to recall the sceptical Pawn to the faith of Chessdom. But the Pawn, in nothing daunted by this formidable array of questions, made instant reply: "*Who* made us, and our Board, and ranks us on it? Why, of course, the very laws that govern us when we are here. As for the variety that enters into our life, and the changeful courses through which we run, and the unlike ends we reach, all that results simply from the variety and subtlety of those laws, which are capable, no doubt, of producing far more numerous and surprising combinations than any we have hitherto seen—laws that, unaided, have already evolved us from the vegetable cells in which our species had its origin, and that in the future will probably develop from us species which will rank still higher in the scale of being. And as for the touch we sometimes feel, or think we feel, and the sounds we sometimes hear, or fancy that we hear; well, of course, there must be mysteries in a world so large and complicated as ours. No one will undertake to explain everything. Every hypothesis leaves some 'transcendental element' or 'unexplored remainder' of the problem untouched. But, because we cannot explain the whole mystery of our existence, I for one am not going to believe that which I cannot understand, and that contradicts what I do understand. The laws of our movements, and that we are invariably controlled by them,—this I can see for myself; but this

Superior Intelligence which is said to use us and our laws freely for ends of its own, who ever saw that ? ”

What the King would have replied to this last outbreak of doubt and unbelief, I am unable to report ; for, at this moment, a large strong hand passed over the Board, and swept all the pieces into a green bag, where they lay down in the dark together.

Now lest any, unfamiliar with the controversies, and even with the great controversy, of the time, should say, “Declare unto us the parable of the Sceptical Pawn,” we add a few words of exposition and application.

There are many men, then, who, professing themselves to be wise, have become “fools,” in the Psalmist’s sense, and say in their hearts, “There is no God.” And the ground they commonly take is this : They have discovered, or they have heard and read, that the great natural forces of the universe act in certain defined and invariable methods or sequences, which are somewhat questionably named “the *laws* of Nature.” And these laws, so at least they suppose and affirm, leave no room for the free play of a creative and governing Will. If they admit the possible existence of God, it is only that of a God who, ages and æons ago, set these great natural forces in motion, but who has ever since left them to work out into their due results, according to the invariable methods which science has discovered and formulated. “There is no God,” they say ; or, “There is no God who can so use and so vary the use of natural laws as to answer the prayers, or minister to the wants, of individual men.”

That He should have revealed Himself to men, that He should have disclosed his eternal love and goodwill, in supernatural and miraculous acts,—this would have been an interference with the pre-ordained course of Nature, which is wholly incredible to any man who has risen to a scientific

conception of the laws that rule the physical universe and give shape to human life. In short, while some of them wholly deny the existence of God, and conceive that both we and the world we inhabit were produced, in some occult fashion, by the very forces and laws which science has found out and formulated; others, admitting the existence of God to be possible, nevertheless maintain that the laws of Nature and of human life are not pliant to his Will, that they move on in a predetermined course, which cannot be modified to meet the exigencies whether of men or nations. They see law everywhere and the reign of law, and they see nothing else. According to them, there is no Divine Will moving freely through the laws of Nature, giving them their efficacy, using, administering, and modifying them in a thousand different ways, in order to carry out the purposes of an eternal goodness and love. And what is all this but to affirm that the two conceptions of law, and of a Supreme Freewill playing through law, and using it for a foreseen end, are contrary the one to the other, and cannot be reconciled?

The argument has often been met by arguments of a superior force. It has been shewn, for example, how the freewill and activity of man perpetually modify the action of natural laws, how he employs these laws for ends of his own, and compels them to produce results other than those which Nature, left to itself, would have produced; how he works *his* miracles, taking a weed and by culture developing it into a flower; putting a tree into a stove, and so inducing it to bear earlier and richer fruit; using a drug to arrest or modify the natural course of a disease. And it has been asked, "If man, by serving Nature, can thus rule her; if by a wise obedience and a skilful use of her laws, he can control and modify their action, why cannot God—if there be a God, and He be immanent in Nature—so use its laws as to

work even greater miracles than these ? ” We see on how large a scale the volitions of the human will “interfere” with the ordinary course of Nature the very moment, for instance, that we compare England as it is with England as it would have been had the foot of man never touched its shores. Why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible that the volitions of the Divine Will should inform, and penetrate, and control, the whole series of physical phenomena ?

And, on the other hand, it has been shewn that science deals only with phenomena, with the shows and appearances of things ; that it is compelled to assume a substance, a reality, a force, underlying all these phenomena—what the schoolmen call a *noumenal*, under or behind the phenomenal world—which it has not grasped, and cannot hope to grasp ; for science, which deals only with phenomena, must ever be unable to find out God, who is not a phenomenon, and, therefore, it has no claim either to assert or to deny his existence. It has never yet found, and never will find, and should not look to find, the soul in man ; how, then, should it find, or expect to find, the animating and informing Spirit of the universe ?

But though we touch these arguments, it is no part of our present purpose to insist upon them. We propose, rather, to set forth, by an apt illustration, a fatal weakness in the position of those who argue, from the scientific point of view, that there is no God. The ground on which their argument rests is, that we are the creatures of fixed and unchangeable laws, which leave no scope for the free play of a Divine Will and Intelligence ; and, for answer to it, we refer them to their Chessboards. Here, too, is a sphere of law, of fixed and invariable laws. Every Piece on the Board has its own clearly defined movement, and cannot vary from it. And surely each of them, had it discourse of

reason, might reasonably argue that, in its circumscribed realm, there was no scope for intelligence and freewill. Any fool of a Pawn might say in its heart, "There is no *man*." Any such Pawn might argue or affirm, "I was never made, but existed from all eternity, and have been evolved or developed into my present form by the very laws which are now at work upon me, and which, in due time, will doubtless carry me forward into some higher and more complex form of existence. The laws by which I am ruled were never devised, nor are they administered, by any creative or superior intelligence; they, also, are eternal, inherent in the very scheme of things." And certainly it might tax even a very wise Pawn to see, not only that he and his fellows had been made by man, and that all the laws of his little realm had been devised by the wit of man; but also that man could freely use these laws, and be helped by them, instead of being hindered, in working out his purpose and design.

To those, then, who conceive that the reign of law necessarily excludes the free play of will and intelligence, we offer this illustration of the Chessboard. We affirm, that just as the strictest observation of its rules leaves full scope to the intelligence and will of man, so the laws of Nature, which cannot be broken, may and do leave full scope to the Divine Intelligence and Goodwill. God both is, and is not, bound by the laws which He Himself has decreed: that is to say, if for the welfare of the universe He is bound to observe them, to observe them does not bring his Will into bondage, nor restrict Him to an absolute uniformity in the choice of the means by which his end is to be reached. He moves freely through those laws, using them at times in the methods we call "natural," and at times in the methods we call "supernatural," because as yet we do not understand them, nor comprehend the whole scheme and course even of physical forces and laws.

If a great Chessplayer moves with a skill, an originality a decision, which seem miraculous to us, we do not therefore suspect him of breaking the laws of the game. And, surely, when the Inhabitant of Eternity comes within the limits of time, and the Creator of all things descends and tabernacles with men, we should be very slow to suspect Him of violating the laws of Nature, however strange and wonderful the works that attend his steps. May it not be that He knows these laws better than we do, and uses them with a power and a freedom beyond our reach, and even beyond our apprehension?

No doubt there is a scepticism which deserves sympathy and respect, but there is also a spirit of doubt and denial which calls mainly for rebuke. A wise man may say—and, if he be a wise man, he will be sure to say it sadly—that he finds no proof, or no adequate proof, of the existence of God in his scientific reading of the few natural facts and processes with which he has been able to acquaint himself. We can understand that, and can sympathize in his sorrow and disappointment. We can even tell him that he has sought for proofs of God where no adequate proof is to be found, since science deals only with phenomena, and God is not a phenomenon, but the Eternal and Divine Substance. But it takes a fool to say, with an air of knowledge and decision, “There is no God;” for how can *he* tell? Has he searched all Nature through, and exhausted the possibilities of discovery and thought? And it takes a fool still more arrant to announce with complacency, and even with elation, that there is no God. For if there be none, alas for him, and for us! Alas for all previous generations, and for the generations still to come! If there be no Father and Friend above us to whom we may go in trouble and when we die, if there be no pure gracious Will ever working in, and through, our weak and erring wills, for our welfare

and redemption, let us bring to a speedy end the solemn farce, or pitiful tragedy, we call "life" !

But we are not reduced to this dreadful conclusion. The proofs of the Divine Existence are to be found in the spiritual province of being, not in the physical ; and where should we expect to find Him who is a Spirit save in the spiritual realm ? "To find God," said Plato, "look within." And both Moses and St. Paul tell us that the Word of God—*i.e.* the revelation of his will, of Himself—is not far from any one of us ; not in heaven, that we should sigh and say, "Who will go up for us and bring it down ?" nor beyond the sea, that we should say, "Who will cross the deep and bring it over to us ?" But the Word is very nigh unto us, in our mind and in our heart, that we may do it. The fool, whose eyes wander to the ends of the earth, may say, "There is no God ;" but he who looks within, and does what conscience bids, he assuredly will, sooner or later, reach that knowledge of God in which is life eternal.

## II.

*The Shepherd's Shepherd.*

PSALM xxiii.

THIS Psalm, than which none is more familiar or more dear to the Christian heart, derives no little of its beauty from the fact that it is the Psalm of a shepherd about a Shepherd, the Psalm of a king about a King. David himself had led a flock to the pastures of Bethlehem, guiding and protecting them with crook and staff as they passed from hillside to hillside. He had himself welcomed to his royal table fugitives from the wrath of Hebrew and of alien tyrants, anointing their heads with oil, and filling their cup with wine till it ran over. And, therefore, he is speaking from his very heart, out of what was most personal and most memorable in his experience. To him *God* was a Shepherd, searching out for his flock "pastures of grass," *i.e.* pastures in which the grass was not yet scorched up by the heat of the sun, and "waters of rest," *i.e.* waters beside which the sheep might securely lie down. God was a Shepherd who, when leading his flock through desolate valleys and gorges, haunted by wolf and lion and bear, defended them with his staff and rod. God was also a bountiful and princely Host, receiving to his table and sheltering in his house fugitives pursued by their enemies, offering them the oil of anointing, and gladdening them with overflowing cups of wine. And because God was both his Shepherd and his Host, David looks up to Him

with an absolute devotion, and rests in Him with a calm happy trust.

This emotion of entire trust receives a threefold expression : "*I cannot want ;*" "*I will fear no evil ;*" "*I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*" "I cannot want, for God will find me green pastures and waters of comfort. I will fear no evil, for even as I pass through the gloomiest and most perilous valleys He will protect and defend me. I will dwell in his house for ever, for He welcomes his guests with an unfailing bounty, and under his roof no enemy can make them afraid."

#### I.

#### I CANNOT WANT.

From the peaceful serenity of its tone, and the absence of any hint of doubt, misgiving, or fear, it is probable almost to certainty that the Psalm was written when David was well stricken in years, when, by the experiences of a long and chequered life, he had learned that in God alone are strength and peace. And it surely was very natural that in his old age he should tenderly revert to the days of his youth, and express his tranquil confidence in God in figures drawn from the pastoral occupations of that innocent and happy time. For no time is so beautiful to the aged as the days when they were young. The sun is never so bright as it was then, nor the earth so fair. They look back on that careless unstained season with a tenderness which transfigures and glorifies all that they behold. And a sensitive reader of David's Psalm will feel, I think, that, when he wrote it, he too was looking back on the past with eyes which transfigured it ; that all that was mean and dull and sordid in it had vanished from his memory ; that his pastoral life, beautiful in itself, grew more beautiful to him as he looked back upon it and yearned after its simple duties and pleasures.

And yet, apart from all the illusions with which men unconsciously adorn the past, that pastoral life had much that was attractive in it, much that made it an apt and telling symbol of spiritual relations and verities. If we would feel its charm, we must remember that the Syrian shepherd was very unlike an English shepherd, and still more unlike the shepherd such as our pastoral poets have conceived him. "Beneath the burning skies and the clear starry nights of Palestine there grows up between the shepherd and his flock a union of attachment and tenderness. It is the country where, at any moment, sheep are liable to be swept away by some mountain torrent, or carried off by hill-robbers, or torn by wolves. At any moment their protector may have to save them by personal hazard." "It is the country, too, of long scorching summer days and intense and parching drought, where the fresh herbage and the living stream are beyond all price, and the shepherd's care and skill must be taxed to provide for his flock." "And thus there grows up between the man and the dumb creatures he protects a kind of friendship. Alone in those vast solitudes, with no human being near, the shepherd and the sheep feel a life in common. Differences disappear, the vast interval between the man and the brute; the single point of union is strongly felt. One has the love of the protecting, the other the love of the grateful life; and so, between lives so distant, there is woven by night and day, by summer suns and winter frosts, a living network of sympathy. The greater and the less mingle their being together; they feel each other. 'The shepherd knows his sheep, and is known of them.'"

The strangely uniting power of loneliness and danger, how they will draw even the wildest and shyest beasts into a sense of the fellowship and sympathy of man, must be familiar to most of us. North Wales is not so wild and solitary a land as Judea was; and yet, as I have wandered

over the Welsh hills, I have had a sheep limp toward me and hold up its broken leg, and a dog extend its thorn-poisoned foot, secure of kindness, and mutely demanding my help.

The grey limestone hills near Bethlehem, on which David fed his flocks, were more than usually solitary and wild. Both the hills and the valleys they enclose are covered with a thin grass and with aromatic shrubs such as are commonly found on mountain-sides. But the downs and the pastures embosomed in the hills of Bethlehem glow with a profusion of wild flowers unknown to less favoured spots: daisies, tulips, poppies, and, above all, anemones—and the white flower which even here in England we call the *Star of Bethlehem*, clothe them as with a garment; and from the prevailing colour of these various flowers, in spring the meadows and hillsides are scarlet rather than green.

How well David must have recalled the grey hills from which the wild beasts stole down on his flock, the pastures now scarlet with flowers and now green with grass—too often withered and brown, scorched up by the burning heat! How well he must have remembered the pure sweet water that rushed in torrents down the hillsides after rain, but only too soon dried up when the rain was over and gone! How well, too, he must have recalled the docility and trust of his dumb companions, each of whom he knew by name; and how hard it often was to find grass for them and water; and his love for them—a love to be measured not by their market value, but by the pleasure he had in tending them, and the jeopardy in which he had stood for them! How natural it was that, with his perfect trust in God, and knowing so well what a shepherd's heart was like, he should conceive of God as *his* Shepherd, as bending over him with a constant tenderness, providing for his every want, defending him from peril, ready even to sacrifice Himself on his behalf

To *us*, between the premise, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and the conclusion, "I cannot want," there may seem a wide interval which needs to be bridged over by logic; but *David* would need no argument to prove that, since God was his Shepherd, all his wants must be supplied. He knew that, when he was a shepherd, no one of his sheep wanted aught that he could get. He had watched over every one of them, and tended them with an unfailing solicitude. He had often wandered on the hills till he was weary, and long after he was weary, to find what little herbage or water the drought had spared. He had driven off birds and beasts of prey with the smooth stones of his unerring sling, and had even ventured himself against the lion and the bear, putting his very life to the hazard that he might save his flock. And if *God* is a Shepherd, will He let *his* flock lack anything that He can get for them? But as there is nothing *He* cannot get, how can they ever know want?

This, doubtless, was David's argument, though he gave it no logical expression. We admit the force of the argument: we admire the beauty of the figure: we feel the pathos of the appeal. We love David for the vigour and the serenity of his trust in the God he had so often put to the proof. But do we not also envy, rather than imitate, him? Which of us can say with entire sincerity, "Since God is my Shepherd, I cannot want. Because He is with me, I will fear no evil. Because He has anointed me with joy so often as I have fled to Him, I will abide in his service for ever"?

Alas, do we not feel that we want *much*, and are likely to want much; that, above all, we want faith and trust and peace? If the present moment be tranquil, do we not trouble it with fears lest some evil should be a-brewing to our rest, and darken the clear heaven of to-day with cares for to-morrow? Do we not often forbode that, through fears fulfilled and wants unsatisfied, we may sink and fall even

from what little vantage of grace we have gained, and that God will account us unworthy to dwell in his House, however earnestly we may long to sit at his table? It may be doubted whether we, any of us, as we consider our lot, can heartily look up to heaven and say, "He maketh me to lie down in grassy pastures, beside waters of rest." It may be doubted whether, as we contemplate the future, with its inevitable changes and dark uncertainties, we can any of us say with cheerful trust, "Surely goodness and loving-kindness shall follow me all the days of my life." And how few are there who, as they look forward to the end, and forecast the moment when they must go out into the dark narrow gorge which leads from this life to the next, can honestly say, "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." As we anticipate that journey, do we even expect to see the Shepherd going before us, staff in hand, to brush from our path any briar of offence, and to guard us from the ills which, at least to our imagination, haunt that gloomy and desolate pass?

Beautiful as the Psalm is, much as we admire it, most of us, I fear, must read it as a rebuke. We feel that we miserably lag behind the fair ideal it sets before us, that we are far from having attained the holy serenity, the calm unwavering trust in God, which breathe through its every word.

If, however, we have any doubt on that point, we may soon bring it to a simple but conclusive test. Can we repeat without doubt or misgiving even the opening words of the Psalm, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I cannot want"? If the Shepherd were to stand among us in the form He once wore, and with gracious looks that won our inmost confidence, were to ask of us, "Children, lack ye anything?" and we felt sure that He would give us whatever we asked

Him for, would there be but one answer from us all? and would that answer be, "Nothing, Lord, nothing"? If we were quite honest with Him, quite frank, should we not meet his question with a chorus of eager supplications? Surely one man would say, "I am poor, and out of employ; I want work, and a fair wage for my work." And another would say, "I am full of eager cravings for innocent pleasures and aids to culture. I love music, books, pictures, cultivated society; and I lack the means to obtain them." And another would say, "I am entering on a new sphere of action, or engaging in a new speculation, and I want a little capital or credit; or I want to feel sure that, if I persevere, I shall succeed." Some would say, "I want that man's, or this woman's love, and I can't be happy without it;" and others, "We want to be certain that we are in very deed the children of the Highest;" and others, "We want to know that we shall triumph over death;" and still others, "We want grace to do and bear Thy will, whatever it may be." Hardly one of us, I suppose, would say, "Lord, we want nothing, for Thou art satisfying, and wilt satisfy, all our need."

And yet, so soon as we consider, we may see that these cries for what we do not possess spring more or less from distrust—most of them from ignorance and wilfulness. If God be our Shepherd, He can get us all we want, for there is absolutely no limit to his power; and He will give us all we want, for there is absolutely no limit to his bounty. Too often we forget his love; and how that love, which embraces all, takes care and thought for each. We want to choose our own way and our own gifts, to walk at our own will, and to see that we have an ample store for future needs. We forget that, if it have a good shepherd, even the flock is not permitted to ramble where it will, and, still less, every sheep in the flock: if they were, there would soon be no flock left, but only a few sheep scattered through many failing pastures or

on many barren hills, each at the mercy of its foes. We are, too commonly, like sheep who should want to see an endless supply of food and water set apart in their private store, as though the sun would never rise, or the rain fall, or the grass grow again ; or, like a flock, which, when one pasture was consumed and one stream dried up, should conclude that the Shepherd knew of no other pasture, and could find no other stream, because they could see none.

If we would at all enter into the rest of David's trust, we must learn both that God cares for the whole flock, and that *He* has provided for the future which we cannot foresee, and for which we cannot provide. If only we could eat our bread and do our work from day to day without fretting about to-morrow, and pass on to new spheres of action and new stores of bread when the Shepherd goes before us, relying on his higher wisdom and love, would not our days go happily enough ? There is hardly any reflection more painful than this, that if we look back on our past lives, and recall all that has fretted and afflicted us, we shall find that most of our fears were groundless fears, most of our anxieties needless anxieties, most of our troubles a burden which we packed with our own hands and imposed on our own shoulders ; and that, had we been content to take each day as it came and put our trust in God, the lives that have been so fretted and so sorrowful, might have been bright with content and cheerfulness. Shall we not, then, for the days that remain, believe that, since God is our Shepherd, we cannot want ?

But let us also understand that, while the Good Shepherd will not let any one of us want any good thing, his main care will be for the whole flock, and that at times He may do us the honour of asking us to take trouble and bear pain for the sake of the flock. That is to say, God cares for the world, as well as for us ; and as He Himself is ever ready

to give his life for the world, as in all our afflictions He is afflicted, so, at times, He may invite us to bear toil and pain in order that we also may serve the world. Shall we shrink or complain if He should put this honour on us? We shall not if we are wise; for, in calling us to this service, He is not, as we might hastily infer, asking us to sacrifice ourselves to the world; He is rather asking us to serve the world by toils and sacrifices by which we ourselves shall be made perfect. Can you recall any labour to which you have bent, or any sacrifice that you have borne for the good of others, which has not, in the long run, made you wiser, better, and even happier? Be sure, then, when the call to service and sacrifice comes again, that God is only asking you to lose your life that you may find it, to serve his flock and suffer for it that you may enter into the joy of your Lord.

Nor must we omit to note this argument for trust and a cheerful content—that God often satisfies our wants by refusing to satisfy them. We have wants of many and divers kinds: physical wants, social wants, intellectual wants, emotional wants, moral and spiritual wants. And these wants, springing from the various planes and aspects of our complex nature, cross each other in the most singular way, and are often directly opposed the one to the other. Often, too, we are unconscious of our deepest wants, while those which lie nearest the surface clamorously assert themselves. Take, for example, a man who is both poor and good. He wants bread, work, wages; perhaps also he *wants*—*i.e.* he has useful and noble faculties, which would be developed by—the means of rising into a position that would afford him leisure and culture: but, above all, he wants and craves an immovable faith in God, in goodness, in truth. He asks God for daily work and daily bread. He asks also for a blessing on his industry that he may win a position in which it will be possible for him to cleanse his heart of sordid cares,

to cultivate his mind, to help his neighbours. Most earnestly of all, he asks that he may love truth in scorn of consequence, that he may obey the Divine law even though he should lose by it or suffer for it, and that he may have the assurance in himself that he does love truth and righteousness before all the riches and pleasures of the world. Now, in some cases, it may be possible that all these prayers should be answered, all these wants supplied. But, obviously, there are many cases in which, if one prayer is to be granted, others must be refused. If the man is to have the witness in himself that he loves truth and goodness first and most of all, it may be needful that he should be tried. He may need to have it proved to him that he can starve rather than steal, that he can put from him what he most longs to have, and what it would be very good for him to have, rather than do what his conscience condemns. But if God is to put him to this proof, and to grant him this inward assurance, He cannot also lift him out of poverty and temptation; the most obvious want must be unmet that the deepest want may be satisfied. And so we reach this curious paradox, which is also a profound spiritual truth, that a man's prayers must go unanswered in order that his prayers may be answered; that God may satisfy his needs by refusing to satisfy them; that he must often feel the pinch of want before he can say, "I cannot want."

How often do we cry, "Oh, if only I could be sure that I had a genuine faith, that my love for God was sincere, how happy I should be!" How often do we ask God to give us an inward conviction of his love for us, and of the sincerity and fidelity of our love for Him! Ought we, then, to be so amazed as we often are when He exposes us to the very trials, miseries, temptations, which can alone assure us that we have a genuine faith in his love, a sincere and supreme affection for Him? Ought we not rather, to feel that He is

thus crossing our desires for present ease and happiness in order to satisfy the deepest craving of our souls ?

Sheep can trust and follow the shepherd whose form and voice they know, even when he leads them, hungry and athirst, along dusty roads and over sharp barren rocks, because experience has taught them that he is conducting them from pastures they have exhausted and streams that have run dry, to new green meadows and to fountains that flow with living water. And are *we* never to trust God, our Shepherd, save when we eat to the full, and drink of the very stream whose waters are most to our taste ? Are the dusty road, and the barren rocks, to prove too much for our faith ? If we have had any experience of his wisdom and kindness, let us follow Him, with a growing faith, whithersoever He may lead, knowing that, because *He* is our Shepherd, we cannot want ; that He is always either supplying the most inward and profound needs of our spirit or leading us to the place where they will find a still ampler supply.

## II.

### I WILL FEAR NO EVIL.

The love of wild and desolate scenery, such as is commonly found in mountain districts, is a modern, and, for the most part, an English passion. To most of *us*, no scenery is so sublime, so attractive as that of "peaks and passes,"—no valleys so lovely as those on which we light where the mountain pass widens out and its lower slopes are studded with meadows, the grass of which, fed by constant moisture and swept by the purest air, shines in the rays of the sun with a brilliance like that of gems. But to the Hebrews, as to the Orientals in general, mountain scenery was terrible and repulsive ; and mountain valleys were true "valleys of *Achor*," *i. e.* "valleys of trouble."

They shuddered as they entered the solemn shadows of lofty ranges, and hurried with beating hearts through the long desolate gorges, where death seemed to reign rather than life, where the winds blew, and the floods raged, and the rocks fell with a fatal and irresistible force.

This dread of scenery which we feel to be impressive and picturesque, finds frequent expression in the writings of the inspired Hebrew poets. We hear its tones in David's Psalm. Feeding his flock on the uplands of Bethlehem, he must often have led them through narrow gorges and across valleys where the hills, shaggy with woods in which lurked beasts of prey, threw their cold sombre shadows on the grass, in order to conduct them to pastures that were still green and to water-courses that were not yet dried up. He must often have listened to the bark of the wolf, the growl of the bear, the roar of the lion, echoing from hill to hill, and have felt the sheep pressing closer upon him as they also heard the voices of their foes. And to him, as he pressed on, buffeted by fierce winds and chilled by rolling clouds that blotted out the farther landscape, such a gorge seemed no unmeet emblem of that dark valley through which every man must sooner or later pass, of the frowning and inhospitable mystery of death.

Yet, if his sheep followed him through storm, and shadow, and cloud, trusting to his guidance and the defence of his staff, should not he follow the Lord, his Shepherd, even though the Divine Shepherd should lead him through the shadows of the Valley of Death, and believe that He was leading him to greener pastures and to waters of life? Would that Good Shepherd abandon him there, where he most needed guidance, protection, and the comfort of a superior Presence? Never. David knew by his own heart that the true Shepherd would adventure his life for the sheep. And, therefore, he could say, "Even when I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

But life has its perils as well as death, the hillsides as well as the gorges; the meadows in which the grass is green and the clear musical brooks are singing over their rocky beds, as well as the long dreary passes through which the winds sweep and the clouds roll. Did not David bethink him of these? Yes, of these too, though he does not mention them. He simply selects the danger which most impressed his imagination, which was most likely to stab his heart with pangs of fear; and on this he tests the temper of his faith. If he can meet "the king of terrors" unabashed, why should he quail before any of the subjects or subsidiaries of that dark potentate? If he can pace the shadows of the lonely gorge with fearless feet, why should he fear the shadows which at times sweep across the bright open meadows? His meaning, his resolve is, "Come what may—change, sorrow, adversity, death itself, yet will I not fear, since God is with me." In his perfect trust he will follow the lead of his Divine Shepherd through all perils, even to the last, with a steadfast composure of spirit. There is no danger from which God cannot defend him, no disaster which He cannot overrule for good; and hence he will pass on, without care and without fear, through all the hazards of life and of death.

"I will fear no evil." Alas, how many evils do *we* fear! What would we give, what would we *not* give, could we honestly adopt David's words? We know that fear is base, that it disarms and paralyzes us just when we most need to quit us like men, to shew ourselves strong and brave. And yet, though it be so base a motive, is there any motive by which we are more constantly animated and betrayed? To what absorbing and degrading cares and toils do men devote

themselves because they fear *want* ! Of what shameful sins are they guilty because they fear *pain* ! What torments do they suffer because they fear *death* ! And how often do they sink into want by the very crimes to which their fear of want has impelled them ! How often do they fall into keener and more insufferable pangs through the very sins which their fear of pain has prompted ! How often do they go all their lifetime in bondage to the fear of that death which brings them an immortal freedom and blessedness ! It is only too probable that most of us have suffered far more from fear of ill than from all the ills that have befallen us. As we review the past, we can see that not a tithe of the calamities we apprehended have come upon us ; that our lives might have been calm and happy but for these fretful and foreboding hearts of ours, had we put our trust in God and been content to wait on Him from day to day. Nevertheless, though we see how groundless most of our fears have been, and what needless torments we have inflicted on ourselves, how many of us, untaught by the past, are at this very moment looking forward with apprehensive eyes, and peopling with grim threatening shadows a future which, but for these unsubstantial forebodings, might be fair and bright ?

Think what our life should be if God is in very deed the Shepherd of Men. With what quiet loving confidence, with what cheerful constancy of spirit, ought we to eat our daily bread, and go about our daily task, looking up indeed if the road be steep and bare, or if we scent danger in the wind, to be quite sure that our Shepherd is with us, and that we are following Him, but utterly refusing to murmur or fear, because He is with us, and his rod and his staff they comfort us. If all things are in his hands, and He is with us and for us, what can harm us ? what can really be against us ?

Contrast with what our life should be, what it is. What

a race against time ! What a selfish competition with each other for what we account the safest place, and the sweetest grass, and the purest water ! How fretted and tormented with fears—fears for to-morrow, if not for to-day ; fears lest our fellows should injure us or we should injure ourselves ; nay, fears of the very Shepherd who goes before us, lest He should abandon us to the wolf, or lest the crook with which He guides and defends us should be turned into a rod of judgment ! O, it is pitiful to see how, all for want of a little faith in God, or a little more faith, we mar and waste our lives, exchange the peace and security of well-ordered days for feverish anxieties which exhaust our strength, and *will* take to our hearts the fear which hath torment, in lieu of the love which casts out fear.

Is it altogether impossible, then, that we should say with David, “ I will fear no evil ” ? Was he less exposed to the shocks of change than we are ? Were the goodness and kindness of God our Saviour more clearly revealed to him than they are to us ? Have we any cause for fear which he had not ?

If we consider the several kinds of fear by which we are racked, I suppose we shall admit that the most common kind of fear, so common as to be almost universal, is *the fear of want*. We may have enough for to-day, but we dread lest we should not have enough for to-morrow. We believe, or profess to believe, that the Lord will provide ; but unless He puts a provision for our whole life into our hands at once, instead of meting it out to us as our needs arise, we cannot trust his bounty. Probably there is hardly a man among us who, since he arrived at what we call “ *years of discretion*,” has not been goaded day after day, year after year, by harassing anxieties for the future, which have to a large extent made his life bitter to him. And yet these fears, as we all know, are only too apt to fulfil themselves. A

man with an anxious mind is not at his best. His apprehensions cloud and confuse his judgment; they fever and exhaust his energies. Could he but go to his work with a heart at rest because stayed on God, he would see his way far more clearly, and do his work far more vigorously, because more happily. It is not our work that kills us before our time, heavy as it is, but the apprehensive mind and anxious heart we carry to our work.

Consider, also, how very few of us have felt the pinch of absolute want: how, therefore, the vast majority of our fears have been craven and baseless, and all the torment they have inflicted on us has been a self-inflicted torment. Looking forward, we have said, "This *will* turn out ill, and that *may* turn out ill; strength is failing me, trade is failing me: how shall I feed, and educate, and place my children! I cannot hope to ride out this storm, or to live down this disgrace. Ah me! what shall I do when the dark day comes?" And yet, as we look back, we have survived, if we have not surmounted, all that seemed to be against us. Even though we still fear for the future, we gratefully admit that we need not have been so fearful about the past. Many changes, many adversities have swept over us or swept close by us, but we have never sunk into absolute misery and need. Our bread has been certain, and our water sure. With each returning day, however overcast, there has been light enough to shew our path, food for our hunger, and a cup for our thirst. Very few of us have been left without a single friend when we most needed a friend, or without work of any kind when we needed work, or without bread to eat when mealtime came. And of the few over whose heads the waters have closed, so that they have gone down into the depths, most will confess that, hard as the time was, and though it struck them into miseries and despairs they shudder to recall, it was nevertheless rife with teaching for

them, rife with benediction ; that it made *men* of them, or better men. I have known some men who had felt the pangs of hunger ; who had long sought work, finding none ; who had been abandoned by their friends, or, in their despair, had withdrawn from their friends and determined to starve rather than supplicate a help which, as they felt, should have been offered them. I once knew one such man very intimately indeed ; but neither in him nor in any other did I ever meet one who did not afterward regard *that* as precisely the most valuable experience Time had brought him, and who would not have lost any other part of his life rather than that. For men who have the fear of God before their eyes, want is not necessarily an evil, that we should fear it so much, nor is wealth a certain or unmixed good. You may prefer to have your part with the rich in this world ; but, honestly, would you not rather have your part with the poor in the world to come ?

Still, though we should not fear want, we need not despise wealth, nor even fear it. It is not the lot assigned to us which is of supreme importance, but the spirit in which we occupy it. A man who lives mainly for truth, for goodness, for charity, in short, for the eternal realities, may be fearless and happy in any lot. What we all need to aim at is a faith in God so simple and sincere that it will relieve us from all fear of evil, whether we be rich or poor, learned or unlettered. And if we know, as we do, that the fear of want weakens and confuses us in our very endeavours to escape want ; that, though we are so commonly tormented by the fear of want, we very seldom find our fears fulfilled ; and that even those who have tasted want declare that it is not wholly or necessarily an evil, we surely have reasons enough for breaking from the bondage of fear, and settling into that simple constant trust in the bounty of God which is guarded against all fear.

But again the question recurs: "Is it possible for men, whose nature is so infirm and apprehensive, and whose lot is so harassed by change, to rise above the fear of evil?" We can only reply, What man has done man may do. None of our lives has swept so large a circle of change as that through which David's swung. From a shepherd, whom even Jesse seems to have held cheap, as a servant rather than as a son, to a king and poet beloved by all the tribes of Israel, how wide the interval! and that interval studded with what strange vicissitudes! Even on the throne, David was not secure from change and want. He had to flee, stoned and cursed by traitors, from the face of a son for whom he would willingly have laid down his life, and to depend for very bread on the charity of a few inalienable friends. And when he wrote this Psalm, looking back on a long life vexed with constant vicissitudes, he missed from his side the men whom he loved best, the friends of his youth, the warriors and statesmen who had borne him to the throne. Yet, as he looks back on a sea whose waves had run so high and in which so many of his treasures had been engulfed; as he looks forward to a sea over which yet darker clouds of storm brooded with menace in their wings, he could say, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me." Should his faith be impossible to us, to whom God is better known? whose lives have been comparatively calm and unvexed with change? and for whom the future, instead of being dark with threatening clouds, is bright with immortal hopes? Nay, our faith should be even stronger than his, and should more profoundly assure us that no evil can befall us, since God is with us and for us.

"Ah! there you touch the very heart of the whole matter," some may interject. "If only we could be sure that God is with us and for us, we should care very little what changes might come, what losses, what sorrows. We

know we could not want anything it would be good for us to have, if He were really with us and were our friend. But it is just *that* of which we are not and cannot be sure. We have sinned against Him. Our sins have unfitted us for his service, alienated us from his love. And the results of these sins, the ghosts of our dead sins, are for ever rising up before us to bar our path. The memory of them shoots sudden pangs of fear and remorse through our most peaceful moods. The taint of their corruption infects our very life, and saps the energies we need for obedience, for faith, for love. The guilt of the past oppresses us with fears for the future—fears that we shall meet new correction, new punishment, at every step; fears that we have so predisposed ourselves to evil that, when new temptations meet us, we shall yield ourselves to them an easy prey. How can *we*, who have done so much that is evil, and in whom so much that is evil still has its haunt, say, ‘We will fear no evil?’”

If the fear of want be the most common fear in the world, *the fear of sin*, and its results both on character and circumstance, is probably the most common fear in the Church. But though it be so common, though we can hardly hope to root it out of our hearts, any more than sheep once bitten by the wolf can be quit of their fear of him, it is, nevertheless, utterly without ground in reason or in religion. However sinful we may have been, God would not have us spend our days in bemoaning the past and trembling for the future, but in redeeming the present. It is not from our faith in Him that this fear springs, but from our want of faith. And, of all the thoughts suggested by our Psalm, none is more precious, none more welcome, than that which helps us to fight down this climbing fear, which teaches us to leave our very sins in the merciful hands of God, and assures us that even these will not be allowed, when once they are renounced, to do us any real harm. If God be our

Shepherd, if He is the Good Shepherd, can He care only for the sheep who are sound and whole, safe in the pasture or safe in the fold? Must He not also care, must He not chiefly care, for those that are sick, and torn and lost? Must He not seek out them that are lost, and bring again them that are driven away, and bind up that which is broken, and strengthen those that are sick, and go after those who have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day? Would He be the Good Shepherd if He did not follow us to whatever dangerous mountain or dismal valley we have strayed, and carry us back to the fold?

Had *David* no sin to recall? Were not his sins heinous enough, if any could be, to shake his confidence, to disturb the peace of his trust in God? Had not he at least as good reason as we have to say, "No; God cannot be with *me* and for *me*. I have alienated myself from his love. I can never retrace the downward steps along which my hot lawless passions hurried me. I can never regain the strength and purity and hope I have lost. Virtue, and goodness, and a quiet heart, are henceforth impossible to me. I can only sink deeper and deeper in the mire, only wander farther and farther from the Presence which was once my joy"? Mark, then, what he does say of himself and of the Lord his Shepherd: "*He reviveth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness*, for his Name's sake; and, therefore, *I will fear no evil.*" David knew very well how many his sins were, how heinous his transgressions, how they had weakened him till his heart fainted within him, and he had wellnigh lost all hope of righteousness and peace. But he also knew the sovereign and infinite compassion of God. He felt that God had poured new life into his fainting spirit, and had led him into "paths of righteousness" which he could not have found for himself, and in which he would have thought himself unworthy to walk had not God led him

into them. He knew also that God had thus revived his soul, not for any merit there was in him, but *for "his Name's sake,"* that He might reveal his true character to men; that, through David, He might shew forth the riches of his compassion, and cause every contrite sinner to hope in Him.

We should miss the very intention of God in reviving the sick soul of David, and restoring his guilty feet to paths of righteousness, did we not gather from his mercy to David a lesson of hope for ourselves. Not for David's sake alone, but also for our sake, was this tender restorative compassion shewn to the self-dishonoured King of Israel. It was shewn that we, whatever our transgressions, might not despair of being recovered to goodness and peace; that we, like David, might say to men, "He reviveth our soul, He leadeth us in paths of righteousness;" and then, turning to God, might add, "We will fear no evil, for Thou art with us."

To us, perhaps, this victory over the ills of life may seem the crowning triumph of David's faith; but, to him, death seemed even more perilous than life. Hence he selects *the fear of death* as the crucial test of his faith in God. "*Even when I wander through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" In imagination he transports himself to the wild desolate gorge, thick with frowning shadows, which, as he supposed, led from this world, and led he hardly knew whither: for he turns to God, and cries as with joyful amazement, "*Even here Thou art with me!*" not, "*He will be with me.*" And it was natural that an old man, who would soon have to plunge into the shadows, should seek to know what death would be like, to ascertain whether his faith would carry him victoriously through the last trial it would have to encounter. It was equally natural that David should conceive of the last trial as the most perilous; for, as yet, life and immortality had not been "*bought to*

light." In his highest moments of inspiration, indeed, David seems to have felt that there must be "paths of life" even in the land of death; that there was a world beyond this visible world in which those who loved truth and righteousness would find rest and a home, that beyond the valley of shadows there were ampler pastures and purer streams. But, even at the best, that world looked dim and indistinct, a mere Hadean world, of which nothing was clearly known save this—that God would be there, and that there, as here, He would reward every man according to his deeds. To face that unknown world, therefore, demanded an heroic faith: If David feared no evil when the cold shadow of death fell upon him, what evil could he fear?

But though *we* too often speak of death as the Hebrew fathers spoke of it, and as though Christ had not poured into its darkness the light of life; though we still talk of going forth, solitary and alone, into an unknown world, and still call death "the king of terrors," we know that we shall not go forth alone, since Christ will be with us; that we shall not plunge into an unknown darkness, but rise into a world of light and joy. To us death is no more "the king of terrors," but a bugbear, such as one of our own poets has painted,

"In night-black arms,  
With white breast-bone and barren ribs. . .  
And crown'd with fleshless laughter,"

out of whose skull-like helm, when the good knight clove it in twain, there

"Issued the bright face of a blooming boy,  
Fresh as a flower new born."

And, therefore, it cannot be so hard for us, as it was for David, to fear no evil from death. We may shrink from the pangs which sometimes precede it; but then, it is pain that

we fear, not death. We may dread lest we should prove to have adjudged ourselves unworthy of eternal life ; but, in that case, it is sin that we fear, not death. Death itself has, or should have, no terror for us : for in itself it is not, and cannot be, an evil. If it were an evil, would the Shepherd of Men inflict it on men, and on all men ? If death is the universal law, must it not be, like all other universal laws, a good and beneficent law ? When, therefore, we pass through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, *we* of all men should fear no evil ; for when the King whom we serve passed through the land that lies beyond the grave, every valley was raised, and every mountain and hill was levelled, the rough places were made smooth, and the crooked places straight ; a highway was prepared for the Royal Sojourner, along which all who love and follow Him shall pass into his eternal kingdom and glory.

We suffer far more from the fear of death than from death itself. Yet even this fear, from which, alas, many suffer a thousand deaths before they die, should not be a formidable, much less a victorious, foe to any who sincerely trust in God. For, as Lord Bacon was keen to mark, “ There is no passion in the mind of man so weak but it mates and masters the fear of death. And, therefore, death is no such terrible enemy, when a man hath so many attendants about him that can win the combat of him. Revenge triumphs over death ; love slights it ; honour aspireth to it ; grief flieth to it.” And if these inferior passions of the soul conquer the fear of death, must not our faith be weak indeed if this also be not able to cope with it and cast it beneath our feet ?

### III.

#### I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

This Psalm, as we have seen, was written by David when he was old, when long experience had taught him to

repose in God with an unwavering confidence—a calm, settled, and invincible trust. Every verse of it is coloured by his memories of the past, and most if not all of them by those happy memories of youth to which age reverts with loving pertinacity, and in which it finds a solace for its weaknesses and fears. David, when a ruddy lad, had fed a flock on the long limestone range which stretches from Bethlehem to the margin of the Dead Sea. When the pastures on one face of this range were exhausted and its streams began to fail, he had led the sheep through gorges dark with the shadows of great rocks, protecting them with his staff from the bears which at times came down from distant Lebanon, and from the lions that came up from the thickets of the Jordan in search of prey. And now he weaves the memories of those happy days of blended calm and adventure into a trustful song of praise. He conceives of *God* as a Shepherd who leads his flock through mountain passes and valleys, on which the shadows fall frowningly, to pastures in which the grass is at its greenest, and the streams run with living water, making a fresh sweet music as they run. And because David knew that the true shepherd would suffer his sheep to lack nothing that he could get for them, even at the peril of his life; because he felt that God was his Shepherd, and that there was nothing God could not get, and no peril from which He could not save, he could say—nay, he could *sing*—“I cannot want;” “I will fear no evil.”

Is it still the Shepherd whom we meet in the closing verses of the Psalm? Are the memories of his pastoral life still giving form and colour to David's thoughts? Most critics, nay, I think all of them, say, No. At this point they say the figure changes; and, whereas in the four first verses of the Psalm we see a Shepherd guiding and caring for his flock; in the last two verses we are to see a King, or

Chieftain, who receives fugitives to his table with a princely hospitality, despite all the threatenings of their foes ; anoints them for the feast with cool fragrant oils ; fills their cup with wine till it runs over ; and so bountifully supplies their wants, that they resolve to stay with him for good, feeling that in his house and company, and reclining at his table, they shall, as it were, "lie in Abraham's bosom all the year," so sweetly will all things be attuned to their mind. The critics have no doubt, however, that here, too, David is drawing upon his personal experience. They feel that in that touch above all, "Thou preparest a table for me *in the presence of mine enemies!*" there is something so picturesque, so individual, that David must have been recalling an incident by which he had been profoundly impressed. They remind us, for example, that as David fled from the face of Absalom his son, when Absalom and his troops were close upon him in the land of Gilead beyond Jordan, Barzillai and other Gileadite chiefs came into the camp of the fugitive and destitute King, bringing him wheat and barley and flour ; and thus substantially, if not literally, "prepared him a table in the presence of his enemies." And they suppose that either this or some similar incident was in David's thoughts when he spake of God as a princely Host, welcoming to his table and treating as guests of distinction men who were hunted by eager and powerful foes.

Beautiful as even this interpretation of the verse is, I am disposed to demur to it in favour of one still more beautiful. No one will question that, if the figure of the Shepherd could be maintained throughout this brief lyric, it would gain in unity of conception, gain therefore in loveliness and force. And why may it not be maintained throughout ? The adventure referred to in verse 5 was surely not unlikely to happen to a shepherd. As David wandered over the wild lonely hills with his sheep, he might well encounter some

unhappy fugitive fleeing from brigands or from the avenger of blood. He might conceal him in the cave in which he himself was about to rest. He might welcome him to his rough plentiful fare, seat him at the board among the shepherds at some rustic feast, anoint him with the oil which every Hebrew offered to his guest, and gladden him with a full cup of the rough local wine which grew on the terraced hills below them. The table might be spread *in the* very *presence of his enemies*; for the feast might take place in a cavern, or on the edge of some precipitous ravine, where they would be secure from the arrows and slings of those who stood and menaced them from the opposite hill. Or David himself, fleeing to the hills from some raid of the Philistines, may have found safety and hospitality in the ancient "Tower of the Shepherds" (Genesis xxxv. 21, and Micah iv. 8), which crowned the hills of Bethlehem, or in some vast cavern into which the neighbouring flocks had been driven. If we *are* to suppose some incident in his life, it is just as easy to suppose an incident likely to have happened to him while he was a shepherd, as to assume an incident in his life as king. And if some such incident as I have imagined did occur before David was taken from the sheepfolds; if, as he sat with other shepherds at a rustic feast, a panting fugitive rushed in upon them, imploring succour, pointing to the baffled yet dangerous foes who menaced him from an adjacent hill; if, charmed with the courage and the free-handed hospitality of the shepherds, and aware that his offence forbade him to return to his former home, he resolved to "take to the hills," and abide with them always: or if David himself, fleeing from a Philistine raid, had lighted on such an unexpected haven of security and repose,—we can well understand that, in either case, the incident would impress his susceptible and retentive imagination, and that it would naturally recur to him and colour his

thoughts now that, in old age, he was recalling the events of his youth in order to give life and beauty to his praise of the great Shepherd of Men.

I venture, therefore, to suggest that we may read the closing verses of the Psalm in this sense, and thus give it the unity of a single dominant figure shaping every verse from the first to the last.

However we read them, we cannot doubt that much new meaning and beauty is thrown into the Psalm by its final verses. Hitherto David has described the providence of God in neutral tints, in negative tones. The Good Shepherd supplies the wants and relieves the fears of His flock. There is grass for their hunger; there is water for their thirst; there is the protecting staff for their weakness. Hitherto, therefore, David has only said, "I cannot want;" "I will fear no evil." True, that even to rise above the fear of want and danger gravely tasks *our* faith. But, to the faith of David, this seems an incomplete result, an inglorious achievement. If he is to do justice to his sense of the Divine trustworthiness and goodness, his voice must take warmer fuller tones. If he is to give the energies of his faith way and scope, he must soar into a higher strain and breathe a more illumined atmosphere. The Divine Providence is far more than a mere Asylum from want, or a mere Refuge from peril. It is characterized by the generous warmth and bounty of a Home. And he who sincerely trusts in that Providence does far more than surmount the depressions of fear and care; he mounts into a triumphant gladness, a sacred and constant joy. Hence David now depicts himself as sitting at the table of the Divine Shepherd, anointed with the oil of festive mirth, drinking of a cup which runs over, so full is it of a quickening joy; while his foes, the enemies of his peace, rave and threaten ineffectually from beyond a gulf they cannot pass.

"*I cannot want?* Want! No, indeed. I am raised a whole heaven above want. I sit at a table lavishly supplied with all that is best and choicest—with fragrant oil on my head, and the wine-cup in my hand. *I will fear no evil?* Fear! What is there to fear in this secure asylum? My enemies—Want and Care! Ah, see, they stand afar off—impotent, incapable of approach. Only goodness and loving-kindness pursue me now, or so pursue as to reach me. I dwell with God, my Shepherd-Host. I sit at his bountiful table. I shall never more go out from his presence. And, therefore, with my whole heart will I sing and give praise. I am the happy guest of God, and dwell with Him in an inviolable sanctuary, an eternal home."

Thus the Psalm, which opens in a mood of sacred and tranquil content, closes in a rapture. He, who knew no want, kindles into an ecstasy of triumphant joy. He, who feared no evil, wears the crown of a victorious and ever-augmenting gladness. He, who was willing to wander in dark and perilous paths, finds himself in the House of the Lord for ever.

Is this joyful and exultant faith altogether impossible to us? Of course it is impossible to us unless we have a faith which has mastered the fear of want and evil. We must begin as David began, if we would end where David ends. And even the first step is hard, almost too hard, for our feeble erring feet. Even if we can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," can we quite sincerely add, "I shall never want"? Are we wholly content with our present lot because it has been ordained for us by Him? Are we content as we contemplate the future, even though we have no security against the biting tooth of penury but his gracious providence?

And if we have taken the first step, can we take the second? If we say, with genuine trust, "I cannot want,"

can we also say, "And I will fear no evil. Wherever the Shepherd and Bishop of my soul may lead, through all perils, even to the last, I will follow Him; and though the shadows of pain and sorrow and death fall blackly upon the path, I will still fear no ill because He is with me"?

To say, with the clear accent of conviction, "I cannot want," and "I will fear no evil," would surely be much for such creatures as we are, in such a world as this. Yet even thus we should not meet the full demand which David makes upon us; we should be far from having reached the serene unclouded height on which he stands and sings. To conquer the cares of life is a great triumph of faith. To conquer the fear of death is, for many, a still greater triumph. But, when these are achieved, the crowning task of faith is still before us. It is not a life of bare content only, or even a life untroubled with any fear, to which David invites us. He would have these sober neutral tints of life flush into the warm passionate tones of joy and hope,—of a victorious joy, of an eternal hope. Instead of bidding us sit in quiet homes of our own rearing, with placid content, because our bread is certain and our water sure, and we are safe from peril, he would have us feel that we dwell in the House of God, the House of many mansions—of which *this* surely is one; that we sit as guests at his generous board, the oil of gladness on our heads, an overflowing cup of joy in our hands, with the sounds of his approaching attendants, Goodness and Loving-kindness, borne to our ears by every wind. As we might have expected from his rich cordial nature, from its capacity of emotion and enjoyment, David paints the ideal of life, not in cool tender greys, but in passionate crimsons and purples; not with the 'prentice hand of a novice, or the timid and circumscribed pencil of a recluse, but with the large flowing strokes of a man who feels that God has put the world under his feet, and given him all things richly to

enjoy. To him God is a royal and bountiful Host, not an austere Taskmaster ; and life is a feast to be taken gladly, not a penance to be meekly and sadly borne ; nay, a feast after battle, after victory, with baffled enemies looking on, but forbidden to approach, unable to annoy.

Why did he take, how could he take, this riant and exulting tone ? Simply because he had a vigorous and immovable faith in a Divine Goodness that would never fail him. Simply because of this faith there was born a sure and certain hope that, however dark the future might look, he should always find a secure and happy abode in the presence and love of God. Have not *we*, then, at least as many and strong reasons as he had for believing God to be of an unfailing goodness ? Have we not even more and stronger reasons than he had, now that the kindness and love of God toward all men have appeared in Christ Jesus the Saviour ? Have we not at least as bright a hope in the future as he had whose longing eyes caught but dim and uncertain glimpses of the Grace that shone beyond the grave ? Have we not a larger and brighter hope now that Christ has brought life and immortality to the light of common day ? Ah ! the fault is not in the heavens which bend above us, nor in the stars of truth and hope which burn in it, but in ourselves, if we are underlings, groaning under the oppressions of care, tortured with fear of evil. We *may* cast our care on God, if we will ; for He has offered to bear it for us. We *may* have our fears cast out by perfect love, if we will ; for He waits to shed abroad his love in our hearts. However poor our dwelling, we *may* make it a house of God ; for it is the King's presence that makes the palace, and is not He with us ? However simple our fare, we *may* sit down to it as to a feast, if we take it as the gift of God ; for it is the presence and welcome and kindness of the Host which make the feast, not the sumptuous viands upon the board. Was David, think you,

a happier man in the splendid mansion at Jerusalem than when he walked the hills with God, and felt that, beneath the free dome of heaven, he was always in the House of the Lord? Did the dainties and luxuries of the royal table ever minister to his joy-loving nature an enjoyment so large and pure as he had often drawn from the rude plentiful fare of the shepherd and the rough wine of the Bethlehem hills?

It would seem, then, that our true enjoyment of life depends, not so much on the place we occupy or the means at our command, as on the spirit in which we use our means and occupy our place. Could we but take even the scantiest fruits of our industry as the immediate gifts of a Divine hand, and feel that our simplest fare was prepared for us by the bounty of God; were we as heartily convinced that every fair happy thought comes as truly from Him as though we saw his servants pouring fragrant oils upon our heads, and filling the wine-cup to the brim,—this constant recognition of his presence, of his care for our well-being, of his joy in our joy, would change the whole aspect and tone of our life. To sit in a palace, at a feast, would be as nothing to the dignity thus conferred upon us, to the pure deep gladness thus quickened within our hearts.

So, again, in the conduct of our spiritual life, all depends on our point of view. Most truly do we conceive of our life as a conflict. Day by day we have to contend with the lusts that make war against the soul, with the solicitations of evil within us and around us, and with our own idiosyncrasies and infirmities, with our defects of will and taints of blood. And as yet, though we may snatch an occasional triumph, the final and decisive victory looks very far off, very dubious even, and only too likely to change and darken into disastrous defeat. But *need* we thus regard the spiritual strife in which we are engaging? Does the Captain of our Salvation thus regard it? Is not the plan of the campaign

his plan? Is not our post, day by day, allotted us by Him? Are we responsible for the issue of the conflict, or does He Himself bid us leave that with Him? Does He demand anything of us save that daily we renew the conflict with steadfast patience? If we are wounded, will not He care for us? If we are over-mastered and trodden down, will not He throw his shield over us? And if the final victory depends on Him, not on us, is not that victory assured? David thought it was. Because he had an invincible trust in the power and goodness of Jehovah, he felt sure that the triumph would come, and that he should share it; that his enemies as well as the enemies of the Lord would be outwitted and outfought. And, therefore, instead of for ever groaning over his wounds, or lamenting the petty reverses of the field, or desponding over his lapses and partial defeats; instead of always thinking of the war, and how hard it was, and how doubtfully it raged, he strengthened his heart by trust in his great Captain and joyful anticipations of victory.

If we had his faith in God, might not we also have his hope in God? If now and again, hard pressed and sore bested, we have had to flee from the powers of evil as though for our lives, and to climb some difficult steep of duty with panting breast, and to fling ourselves as at the feet of a stranger on the summit, mutely supplicating the succour we had no breath to ask; have we not recognized, in the stranger, a Divine Friend, and been drawn by Him into an impregnable asylum, and found a table spread for us as for honoured and expected guests, and exchanged the garment of heaviness for the spirit of praise? And if in past straits and distresses we have found the House of the Lord always open to us, and the table of the Lord always spread for us, why should we fear lest the time should come when the gates will be closed against us, and the anointing of the Spirit and the wine of his mountain will be withheld

from us? We have no reason, and therefore we have no right, to fear. As we look back, we can recall many moments of danger and despair from which He has saved us. We can see, now, that we were wrong to distrust his care of us, his generous provisions for all our needs. We confess that we have been brought safely through the hazards of the past, terrible and fatal as they once seemed. Why, then, should we dread the perils which lie around us or before us, or so dread them as to lose trust in our Shepherd and Host? Cannot He save us even from these? If, as we look back, we can say, "He *has* prepared us a table in the presence of our enemies;" can we not also look forward and say, "Thou *wilt* prepare us a table; Thou wilt anoint our head with oil; our cup will run over"? If, as we face the past, we can say, "Goodness and loving-kindness have followed us all the days of our life;" cannot we add, as we face the future, "And we shall dwell in the House of the Lord for ever"?

To flesh and blood, indeed, this constant and joyful confidence in the Great Shepherd of Men is hard:—hard? nay, impossible. But, to faith and hope, it is not impossible, though it be hard. And we are of those who profess to confer, not with flesh and blood, but with the faith which is the substance of things not seen, and the hope that maketh not ashamed. Could we but rise to the full height of hope and faith, our life would shape itself as a feast, with God for Host; and death, as a going home, to dwell with Him for ever. Could our faith but grasp the love of God as manifested in Christ Jesus his Son, we should grow strong in a hope such as David did not and could not know, a hope of which even this beautiful Psalm is not an adequate expression. For that, we should have to add to David's Psalm the song of one of the great Minnesingers of Germany, who died five centuries ago:—

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“ Now will I never more despair of heaven,  
Since it is thine, my Father, who hast given  
Thy glorious kingdom to the poor indeed.  
Yea, mighty God, since Father is thy name,  
Christ for my Brother I may dare to claim,  
And He for all my sins will help me plead.  
A brother's truth to us He swore  
When on Himself He took humanity;  
For us alone that form He wore,  
For us alone hung high upon the Tree.  
Look, in what cruel sorrows there He pined !  
Dear Lord, I bid Thee call those woes to mind,  
And, brother-like, entreat thy Father, who is mine,  
To give me, too, my lot in that blest heritage of thine.”

## III.

## Man's Life Ordered by God.

PSALM xxxvii. 23.

THE world is wide, and men are many ; the universe is wide, and worlds are many. It is easy for us to look up on a clear night, and muse on the multitude of the heavenly host, till our world dwarfs into a mere mote for which it seems impossible that the Lord of all should take thought. It is easy for us to meditate on the multitude of men, their varied, complex, and often opposed interests, till it seems impossible that God should care for us. Indeed, it is a radical fault in our habit of thought, that we conceive of the Infinite as embracing the finite without touching it at every point ; that we conceive of the Divine Providence as embracing all worlds, all races, all men, yet not as touching every individual man—as extending over the whole without extending to every part. Thus, for instance, we find it much easier to say with clear conviction, “ Christ came into the world to save sinners,” than to say, “ He loved me, and gave himself for me : ” yet how should He die for the whole sinful world, except by dying for every man of whom the world is composed ? We find it easier to believe that God cares for us all, than that He cares for each of us ; yet how can He care for all, except by caring for each ? We find it easier to conceive that the thoughts of God are occupied with the general

tenour and main interests of our individual lives, than that they are busy with the several minute actions and circumstances of which our lives are made up: yet how can He shape our life, and provide for its main interests, except by giving careful heed to every circumstance of it, however minute?

1. Now David's phrase corrects this faulty habit of thought. It tells us, not simply that the steps of *all* good men, but that the steps of *a* good man, are ordered by the Lord. It assures us that we are not lost in the crowd; that He who calls each of the stars by its name, knows our personal make and need, and extends to each one of us a care no less gracious and efficient than that which leads the stars in their courses. There is no man so mean and inconsiderable in the eyes of his fellows but that he is of an infinite worth in the eye of God; there is no outcast, loaded with the scorn of his neighbours, who is not the object of a tender and Divine solicitude.

Here we all are, walking on our several paths, making our several tracks up the hill of life—some of them very faint, very devious, running much in shadow, breaking through many hedges of law; and God's eye is on all—on *each*. "He knoweth the way we take;" and if we are good men, or are even trying to be good; if it be our ruling endeavour to walk within the bounds of law, and to reach the clear summit—the shining table-land of duty which lies all bathed in the Divine favour, God *orders* our way, correcting our mistakes, retrieving our faults and blunders, strengthening and comforting us in those weak moments in which the way seems too hard, and the summit, obscured by clouds, looks too far off to be accessible to our weary feet.

Nay, not only does God order the *way* of a good man, he orders his very *steps*; that is, He ordains and overrules the

actions and events of the passing day, hour, minute--all the poor and trivial conditions which limit and shape our life. Whatever the station we occupy, however poorly or richly furnished; whatever the work we do, however inconsiderable in itself, or however feebly we may do it; He, who holds all things in his gift and works through all, is with us, and with us to guide us with his eye, to uphold us with his hand. We may do all we do, from eating and drinking up to the rarest exercises of inventive or imaginative genius, "as unto Him," and thus give an added dignity to our task; the happy consciousness of service being as a sweet inward music to which our steps are attuned, by which they are reduced from aimless ramblings to a Divine order and sequence.

David's life is an illustration of his own words. *His* steps were ordered by the Lord. In little things, as in great, he was under the Divine direction and care. If the Spirit of the Lord moved him to fight Goliath, the selfsame Spirit also moved him to reject Saul's armour, and to go down to the conflict equipped only with sling and stone. Nay, was not his very skill in the use of the sling, though bred of long practice, none the less a Divine gift? Was not God with him, and directing him, every time he flung smooth stones from the hillside brooks at the birds and beasts of prey that harassed his flock, and thus gradually preparing him for the conflict with the giant of Gath? The Spirit of the Lord taught him to see wondrous things in the law of Moses, to hear the cold stern laws gliding into sweet music, and statutes breaking into song; but it was also the Spirit of the Lord which taught him to read a Divine message in "the tops of the mulberry trees" as they swayed in the passing wind, and to find a spiritual beauty in mountains, and valleys, and streams, and all the profuse loveliness of the goodly land. The steps of the shepherd and of the wander-

ing fugitive were no less "ordered" than those of the hero and the king. It was by ordering all the details of his daily life that God made him meet to sing psalms and to rule Israel.

Do any object: "But David had a special direction and inspiration, 'the Spirit of the Lord came upon him,' and therefore his example yields little hope to us?" The holy apostles affirm that we, too, if we believe in Christ, are "temples of the Holy Ghost." In his final bequest, the Lord Jesus promised his Spirit to all who follow Him—said, even, that He and his Father would come and take up their abode with us, the whole Sacred Trinity hallowing the inner shrine of the heart with a perpetual Presence. Are this promise, and that affirmation, to be explained away? Are we to account them hyperboles, metaphors, the natural exaggerations of a passionate love? Rather, they are the language of soberness and truth, and are confirmed by our daily experience; for which of us may not at any moment enter this inner temple and hold a sacred strengthening intercourse with the Father of our spirits? When have we entered the temple, with a sincere and reverent heart, and found no Oracle to respond to our prayer for guidance? Were we ever, any one of us, at a standstill yet, through not knowing what to do next, when we simply wanted to know and do that which was right? A Divine Presence, then, and a sacred infallible Oracle, these are at *our* command, as they were at David's; and therefore we, like him, may make God's statutes our song, and have our steps ordered by the Lord.

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord," *all and every* of his steps; and, therefore, all our false steps and wandering steps are known to God. How else could He stay us, and bring us back to the true path, and overrule our very blunders and offences, running his Divine purpose

through all actions and passions of the soul, and causing them all to contribute to that purpose? God was with David when the fire of his wrath burned hotly against Nabal the churl, as well as when he listened to the gracious courtesies of Abigail; when he was moved to slay the sleeping Saul, as well as when "he played before Saul," ministering to a mind diseased with harp and voice; when he stole the poor man's one ewe lamb, as well as when the pangs of his contrition gave birth to the most mournful and self-accusing of psalms. Ah, terrible, yet most comfortable, thought! God is with us, into whatever dark shades of guilt we stray; but with us to shed light into our darkness—a light which, while it rebukes our evil, redeems us from our bondage to evil.

2. The steps of a good man are *ordered* by the Lord. The man takes them, but God *orders* them; He marshals and aims them at an end other and higher than the man had placed before him—human freedom and Divine rule working together for good. David, for example, while a mere stripling, aimed to be a good shepherd; he was willing to give his life for the sheep; he slew the lion and the bear. In the intervals of labour he solaced himself with the harp till he grew "cunning in playing." *He* meant nothing more than present solace and duty; but *God*, who ordered his steps, was looking to the future. David was intent on his flock and harp, but God was preparing him to conquer the giant, and to charm away the evil spirit from the king. Even the checks and disasters that seemed against him were for him. Saul broke his plighted word, laid new labours on the champion of Israel, withheld the promised reward, hated him, hurled javelins at him, drove him from the kingdom. If we look only at the crazy fugitive "scrabbling" on the gates of the Court of Gath, or the predatory chieftain hiding, with his ragged band, in wood and cavern, we may fail to

trace any Divine order in the life of David ; we may even think that it had been better for him had he been left to the simple duties and pleasures of the pastoral life : but if we look to the end, and take in his whole career, we see that in his wise gracious providence—a providence that can adjust and compensate all ills and disasters—God was both training David to be a good king and directing the eyes and hopes of all valiant Hebrews, who resented the tyranny of Saul, to the fugitive son of Jesse. Through all that strange, wild, and sometimes lawless life God was with David, developing his capacity for wise patient rule, and paving the way for the fulfilment of the promise.

And as *we* recall the past, can we not see that a higher wisdom than our own has ordered *our* steps, and has still shaped our ends for us, rough-hew them how we would ? At times, indeed, we have taken our own way, and have had to pay the penalty for taking it. But, for the most part, if we have tried to live a good life, our wishes have been crossed, our aims thwarted, our plans struck awry ; and though we have often murmured at a discipline so severe, we can now see that God was thus raising and purifying the tone of our life ; that if He led us by a way we knew not, and did not like, it was only that He might bring us to a larger place and a diviner rest than we should have chosen for ourselves. Very few of our youthful dreams have been fulfilled. We are neither what, nor where, we meant to be. Our aims have often been shifted, sometimes raised ; our path has been devious, uncertain, full of surprises and disappointments. *We* have taken step after step, but God has ordered them all. We are in his hands, and He is teaching us to gain freedom by obedience ; by service He is preparing us to rule ; by losing the world, to gain it ; by renouncing, to find, ourselves. These are hard lessons to learn, but of all lessons the most happy and precious when once we have

mastered them ; for, as a wise Rabbi has said, " So soon as we do God's will as though it were our will, we shall find Him doing our will as though it were his."

3. Nor let us forget that He who orders one life must order *all* lives. We are bound together by ties many and most subtle. Friends and enemies, neighbours and aliens, contemporaries and ancestors—all influence and help to form our character. Statesmen who made laws, poets who sang songs, and mechanics who applied discoveries or invented conveniences, years or centuries ago, are in part responsible for what we are ; their words and laws and inventions colour our thoughts and shape our habits. We are touched and formed by our national codes and customs and literatures, and, in some measure, by foreign codes and literatures—by the genius of every great man who ever lived—by the actions of every race, even the most remote. We could not have been what we are to-day, had we come of a different stock, or lived in another age, or been placed in different circumstances. And because we do not stand isolated and alone, but are members of a race and belong to mankind, He who orders our steps must have ordered the steps of all our fathers, and of all men the wide world over.

Let the Psalmist once more illustrate our thought. There could have been no David, or no such David as we know, but for Moses and his laws, but for the prophets and their inspiration, but for Jesse and the pastoral life of Bethlehem. David's meditation on the statutes which came by Moses, on the rebukes and exhortations of the holy prophets, no less than all the calm peaceful influences of his shepherd experience, helped to make him what he was. Nay, there could have been no David, or no such David as we know, but for his envious brothers, the heathen giant, the jealous king ; but for these, and their hostile attitudes, the whole scope

and flow of his character and life must have been other than it was. The God who ordered his life must have ordered their lives, and ordained the points and moments at which the line of his history was touched, and crossed, and bent by theirs. And thus we come back on the large conclusion of charity, that He who made us all loves us all, and orders all our steps, guiding them to other and wider and loftier issues than those we have set before us or can so much as discern.\*

But if the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, how comes it to pass that the good man is so often called to walk in steep difficult paths, that so often he has to stagger on under a heavy burden of sorrows? There are many answers to that question, all of which we need to take into account; but none of them perhaps is more comforting and inspiring than this: That just as we choose the best men for the most difficult and perilous services, bidding the bravest sailors stand by the sinking ship, or sending the most gallant soldiers on the forlorn hope, so God honours the best men and women by calling them to confront the worst perils and to endure the sharpest afflictions. He puts them in the forefront of the battle, or sets them to labour at a losing cause, or chastens them with stroke on stroke—not that they may suffer many wounds, or be crossed by many disappointments, or faint beneath many rebukes; but that they may rise into a more delicate purity, possess themselves of a

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\* This, indeed, is what David says, viz., that the steps of *man*,—man in general,—and not only those of the good man, are ordered by God though what he *means* probably is that only the good man can expect a constant Divine guidance. A literal rendering of the verse would run, “By Jehovah (is it) that *man's* steps are ordered, so that He hath pleasure in his way.” Still, as Perowne remarks, “The sentiment is put in a general form, but the *righteous* man, as he appears in the Psalm, is meant, as is clear from the next verse.”

more patient and heroic faith, and win the larger honour and reward.

Let us, then, place ourselves in his kind hands; for if we trust in Him, in whatever path He orders our steps, He will bring us home to Himself at last, and bring us home by the best and safest road.

## IV.

## The Sea and the Sanctuary.

PSALM lxxvii. 13, 19.

IT is very difficult for an insular and maritime people, such as we are, so much as to conceive the dread in which the sea was held by the ancient Hebrews. To *us* the sea, though it has its terrors, though its tempests often strew our coasts with wrecks, is nevertheless our pleasant companion, our willing and most helpful servant. It is a main source of our wealth; it is the channel of our commerce and intercourse with the world: it is a wall of defence round our coasts. We love to inhale the keen pungent airs it brings, to plunge into its waves, or to ride over them in sport. It has a large and honourable place in our literature, in our ballads and songs, in our national history and drama. The sailor is our special pet and hero. His bronzed complexion and rolling gait, his open hand, his frankness and simplicity of speech, and even the quaint pranks he plays when ashore, have a certain attraction for us. If we laugh at him, our laugh is a very kindly one, and we are not slow to blaze up in his defence. But to the ancient Israelites—as, indeed, to all the Oriental races of antiquity except the Phœnicians—the sea was a hostile and terrible mystery. To them, it was “that great and wide sea,” in which men might so soon be lost or overwhelmed. Although the Mediterranean sweeps along the whole of one side of Palestine, yet the coast has no

indentations, no winding creeks, no deep havens, no ample and secure ports, such as are common on the European sea-board. The two harbours, Joppa and Acre, which were its only ports in ancient times, and are still the chief (if not the only) means of access from the sea, are very dangerous; no vessel will ride in them save on compulsion, lest it should be dashed on the frowning inhospitable rocks. It was natural, therefore, that the Jews should hate the sea, as much as we love it; that to them it should seem full of mystery and terror, a cruel ravenous monster lying in wait to destroy those who might be won to it by its fatal beauty or its treacherous calms. The Old Testament Scriptures express this conception of the sea, and only this. It is, I believe, invariably used as an image of mysterious danger and terror, or spoken of as a wily and deadly foe. And though *we* can hardly refrain from smiling at the threat of Moses that, if the children of Israel did not keep all the words of the law, they should be carried back "into Egypt again *in ships*" (Deut. xxviii. 68), no doubt, *to them*, the "ships" were well-nigh as terrible as Egypt itself, and the thought of that dismal voyage as intolerable as the prospect of cruel bondage.\*

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\* Many of the modern Oriental races have the ancient terror of the sea. Thus, for example, the natives of Central India call it *kala panee*, "the black water"; and Sir John Malcolm relates that when Cheetoo, the terrible Pindaree chief, was flying in hopeless misery from the English, he was often advised by his followers to surrender to their mercy; but he was possessed with the idea that he would be transported, and that would have been more terrible to him than death. His followers, who all, one after another, came in and obtained pardon, said that during their chief's short and disturbed slumbers, he used continually to murmur, "*Kala panee! kala panee!*" Thus haunted, he never would yield, till at length all his people, one by one, had forsaken him in the jungle, and a mangled body was found in a tiger's lair, which the sword the ornamented saddle, and a letter-case containing official documents proved to have been that of Cheetoo. (See Heber's *India*, ii., 550-51.)

But if we find it difficult to realize their feeling for the sea, their feeling for *the sanctuary* is almost as much beyond us. In our complex modern life the centres of interest are many and various. We seek amusement, instruction, holiday festivity, health, vigour, comfort, in many different places, at many different sources. But almost all that *we* get from concerts and spectacles, from story and poem, from courts of justice and legislation and royal splendour, from lectures and sermons, from worship and communion, was found by the Hebrew in one sacred centre—in the Temple and its precincts. Thither he went up to make holiday. There he listened to the sweetest and grandest music of his time. There he first heard any new poem written by the inspired singers of Israel. There he beheld the king with his splendid court, and gazed on long stately processions in which priest and Levite, statesman and prophet, defiled before him in their rich costly robes, while clouds of sweet incense floated through the air, and choir and antichoir lifted his heart to heaven on the concord of their triumphant hallelujahs. There his lawsuits were investigated and decided. There he met his brethren from every province of the Holy Land, and strangers, Jews or proselytes, out of every nation under heaven. There his conscience was cleansed from its defilements, the solemn priestly benediction carrying the sense of forgiveness to his penitent soul. There he listened to the law of the Lord, to the stirring recitations of the brave deeds and national deliverances wrought of old, to persuasive exhortations to loyalty and obedience. There, too, he might chance to meet a prophet, the fire of inspiration burning in his eye, and hear some message straight from heaven, or be summoned to enter into a national compact for unseating an usurping tyrant or for destroying the idols out of the land.

We need to think of all this—of the strange terror with which the Hebrew was inspired by the mighty restless sea—

of the holidays and feasts, the dramatic spectacles and ravishing choirs, the glimpses of foreign men and garbs and manners, the excitements of political news and endeavours, the celebration of national victories and deliverances, which the Hebrew naturally associated with the Temple, no less than the joys of worship and communion with Heaven. We need, I say, to think of all this, if we would enter into the meaning of the words, "Thy way, O God, is *in the sea*, Thy way is *in the sanctuary*."

One of these phrases, too—nay, both—contain historical allusions which add to their significance. In the closing verses of the psalm, Asaph celebrates the exodus from Egypt. His thoughts revert to the time when Jehovah "led his people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron;" when, as they trod the margin of the Red Sea, "the waters saw" God, "and were afraid," trembling, and parting to their utmost depths, and the Hebrew pilgrims passed dryshod through the abyss in which the Egyptians were drowned. God's way was *in the sea then*, his path on the great waters, and his footsteps, washed out by the recoiling waves, are not known. As the Hebrews thought of that dreadful night and the mysterious issue of it, the sea grew still more mysterious and terrible to them, as did also the ways of God. Probably, too, in the other verse, there is an allusion to the fact that God went before them, through all their wanderings, in the tabernacle over which "the pillar of fire and of cloud" rested, and moved, and was their glory in the midst of them. His way was then *in the sanctuary*—the sanctuary in which Moses spake with Him face to face, and from the sacred "doors" of which the prophet had so often to vindicate the ways of God to man.

These historical allusions, then, at once confirm and define the general significance of Asaph's phrases. They lend them new force. The mystery of the Sea deepens as we

recall that mysterious passage through its waters, and the revelations of the Sanctuary grow more distinct as we remember how often God met Moses in the tabernacle, that He might explain to him the secret and purpose of his dealings with the people.

But what have *we* to do with these local allusions, or even with the broad general significance of Asaph's words,—we, to whom the sea is a friend, not a foe, and in whose sanctuary no Shekinah burns? We have much to do with them, but chiefly this, *that they at once set forth the mystery of the Divine Providence, and teach us where we may find the key to it.* For us, God's way is still in a mysterious Sea, and still we learn the secret of the mystery only as we behold Him in the Sanctuary. His providence is still wrapped in clouds that are often very terrible to us; and still the light shines through the clouds on the worshipping heart.

How many, how inscrutable, how terrible are the mysteries which encompass the ways of God! How often are our hearts torn and perplexed as we consider them! On how large a scale is evil at work in his good world! With what a subtle and penetrating force it pierces even into the purest spirits! How many a modest and fair exterior hides a life incredibly corrupt? If we could but see each other's hearts, and read all the guilty desires, all the mean ambitions, all the petty jealousies and enmities which have left their defiling traces there, who could endure the sight? Nay, who could endure to read so much as his own heart as God reads it, and in his light?

Why, oh, why did God make us thus? Why make evil so easy and alluring to us, and good so hard, so uninviting? Why are we so weak that even when, after much discipline and many endeavours, the will to do good is present with us, even then the power to perform we find not, and in our very attempts to do good we often slip into fresh evils? Why

are there so many incurable evils in the world around us—broken hearts that we cannot heal even with our blood, hopeless lives that we cannot brighten, degraded natures that we cannot raise, lost souls that we cannot save, do what we will? Why should men be born with an hereditary bias to vice and crime, and never have, so far as we can see, a single chance of goodness and peace? There are thousands and myriads such among us. They live untaught amid their ignorance, unsolaced amid their woes, with no healing and inviting light of truth shining near them; nurtured in filth, trained to crime, their highest act the worship of fraud or force or lust, their whole condition so dreadful and unfriended, that one sometimes thinks the sins and sorrows of a single court or alley enough to silence all the songs of heaven. And, beyond our borders, in China, in Hindostan, in Africa, in all the habitable parts of the globe, there are whole races whose morality is an outrage on the sacred name of Virtue, or whose worship is a mere riot of the senses.

Why are there so many miseries—miseries past all telling, in the world? Why do the young and fair and hopeful die? Why do the good suffer? Why are our virtues well-nigh as fatal as our vices? Why do the wicked prosper? Why is brute force allowed to trample bright intelligence under foot? Why should vast armies of men be withdrawn from the productive arts and toils of life, to support a tyrant on his throne, or to resist the lust of conquest? Why should the millions tremble on the verge of ignorance and want, while only the thousands taste the sweets of culture and opulence? Why should almost every family have its secret of sorrow or guilt, and almost every heart a wound which no tender hand can stanch?

As we ponder and multiply such questions as these (and in some moods we are very apt to multiply them), are we not, at least for the time, shaken from our customary blind-

ness or indifference? Do we not stand as on the margin of that dark ocean, in whose unfathomed depths there lie mysteries of terror before which even the bravest heart may well recoil? Are we not driven to the conclusion—"Thy way, O God, is in the sea; thy judgments are a great deep. We cannot trace thy footsteps in this dark mystery. We only hear them as from afar, and with a secret foreboding and dread"?

We are not the first who have stood on the margin of this mysterious sea, and who have been thus miserably perplexed. Asaph, for one, stood here before us; and he confesses that, as he gazed out on the dark and darkening sea, "his feet were almost gone, his steps had well-nigh slipped." When he sought to penetrate the mystery of Providence, it was "too painful" for him. With dizzy head and fainting heart he crept away from this cruel insatiable sea, leaving the problems that perplexed him unsolved. He found no relief until he "went into the sanctuary of God." And even then *he* found a relief which is, I trust, no relief to us. To his stern Hebrew temper it was a sufficient solace to learn that the wicked prosper but for a time; that they are set on high "slippery places" only that they may fall, and that their fall may be the more profound. But if we have the *Christian* temper, that, so far from being a solace to us, will only be an aggravation of our sorrow and perplexity. For what chiefly troubles *us* is not that *we* are called to suffer, but that humanity at large groans under evils so many and so intolerable; that which we most deeply crave is not exemption from suffering for ourselves, nor even for our immediate kinsfolk and neighbours, but a firm conviction that all the evils and pains which afflict the world have a wise meaning and a merciful end, that there is a final goal of good to which all things will round at last.

And such a conviction, God be praised, is well within our

reach. It may be proved, even to the sceptical reason, and often has been proved, that good preponderates over evil even in this present world, and that the evils which for a time vex and depress our life are designed to lead us to a higher and more stable good.

But the troubled heart is often impatient of logic. It craves a solution which appeals more directly to itself. It demands, not a demonstration, but an experience. And even this demand may be met. There is an experience to be had which lends instant comfort and strength to the heart, and makes it independent of the tardier processes of the intellect. If we go into the sanctuary of God, we shall no longer be vexed with the troublous beat of the mysterious sea. In the worship of God, in the blessedness of communion with Him, in the deepening sense of his love and goodwill to us and to all men which worship quickens within us, we reach a tranquil haven of repose that no storm can disturb.

Do you doubt it? Take, then, an extreme case, a decisive test. The patriarch Job not only stood on the margin of this sea, but was tossed on its waves for many months, during which "neither sun nor stars appeared," and "all hope that he should be saved was taken away." "Ye have heard of the patience of Job," and of the terrible strain to which it was exposed. You know how at length its strands parted, and he was driven out on the tempestuous waters of doubt, calling on heaven and earth for succour, but winning no response. Have you not also, at least in his case, "seen the *end* of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of a most tender mercy"? And yet, when "the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind," He did not answer one of the objections which the tortured patriarch had charged against his justice. He solved none of the problems Job had discussed, replied to none of the questions he had asked, vouchsafed no vindication of his ways. He simply passed

before Job, proclaiming his greatness, revealing his glory. Job "*saw*" God, and that was enough. The view of that perfect beauty and holiness silenced every doubt, healed every wound. While as yet his losses were uncompensated, his pains not removed, his reasonable doubts not met, he was nevertheless persuaded of the perfect righteousness of his Judge, the perfect goodness of his Friend. He bowed in worship and self-abhorrence; he retracted all his doubts and aspersions; he was filled with an inward strength and peace. In short, so soon as he "*saw with his eyes*," the God of whom he had before only "*heard with the hearing of the ear*," he passed at once from the wild Sea of doubt into the Sanctuary of a perfect and assured trust.

And have we not all, in our several measures, entered into this most happy experience? If we have ever worshipped Him who is a Spirit in spirit and in truth, if we have ever had our hearts lifted into a genuine communion with Heaven, if we have ever beheld the King in his beauty and grace, have we not been forthwith strengthened and tranquillized? Have not spiritual intuitions and instincts, which go deeper than any logic, assured us that the Lord is good, that He is very pitiful and of a most tender mercy? Have not the perplexing and insoluble questions which haunted and afflicted us receded to an infinite distance, and dwarfed into petty proportions, in that great flood of peaceful light? Have not the waves on which we were tossed sunk into a great calm? Have we not felt the strongest conviction that God's ways must be just and good, and confessed, if we could not demonstrate or even intellectually comprehend their goodness, *that* was simply because his goodness was too large for us to grasp? Has not "*the great deep*" of his judgments thus become a source of health to us, an incitement to intercourse with Him, a new wall of defence round us,—nay, round the whole world,—

instead of a dark fathomless mystery, haunted by threatening terrors before which we quailed? Has not the very "sea" of his providence been transformed into a "sanctuary," in which we were secure and at peace?

But we may raise our thoughts to a still loftier pitch, to a height from which the questions of the perplexed intellect and the demands of the troubled heart are both met in one triumphant solution of the mystery of Providence. "He who is higher than the highest" once took flesh and dwelt among us. As though to shew how inevitable it is that men should rise through evil to a completer good, the Son of Man endured the assault of all the evil that is in the world. He was innocent, upright, free from guile; yet He was bruised and put to grief. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted." "He was despised and rejected of men." "He was stricken, smitten of God," abandoned in the hour of his supreme agony. Reproach broke his heart, and he was full of heaviness. He looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but he found none. The one perfect Man, the only Man in whom was no sin, He could yet appeal to all that passed by, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."

Was not *He* tossed on that dark mysterious "sea" from which we shrink? Did not all its waves and billows pass over Him? As we consider the story of his life, the *wonder* of his life, is not the dark problem of the Divine Providence at its very darkest? What are our sufferings compared with his? If *we* can think ourselves wronged, afflicted with unprovoked stripes, what are our wrongs, or our deserts, to his? Yet out of all that darkness there rose the great light, out of all that evil there broke the supreme good. By his obedience unto death the whole world is redeemed unto God. nay, He Himself, in some ineffable way,

makes increase to Himself of wisdom, of authority, of glory. "He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." "Because He humbled Himself, God hath highly exalted Him."

Here, then, we have the crucial test applied to the providence of God. We are taught, and taught in a method which appeals both to our reason and our heart, that evil *is* to be overcome of good, that all the sorrows and wrongs of time are intended to conduct men to a good larger and more complete than that of untempted innocence, or untried obedience, or unafflicted virtue. We see the Perfect Man pass through the deepest waters of the great dark "sea" of evil, into the "sanctuary" of an everlasting glory and peace. Shall *we* murmur and complain, then, if we are called to tread in his steps, to follow Him through the great waters in which his footsteps *are* known? Shall we not rather rejoice that we are counted worthy to enter into his affliction, and rest in the assurance that we shall pass through his affliction into his rest and joy? Shall we lose hope for the world because it is smitten with evils so innumerable and profound? Why should we, when, for "creatures such as we are, in such a world as this," the path to the highest and most enduring good runs right through those very evils? Let us rather "rejoice in hope," and in this hope,—that, like the Captain of its salvation, and in virtue of his redemption, the world will also rise, through evil, into larger good, and pass across this troubled and tempestuous "sea" into the "sanctuary" of God, the house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.

## V.

## Freedom by Obedience.

PSALM cxix. 45.

THERE can be no doubt, I think, that the writer of this psalm loved the law of God with a sincere and profound affection, although he took a very quaint way of shewing his love. He said within himself, "I will write a psalm all about the Divine Law. My psalm shall have as many stanzas in it as there are letters in the alphabet. Each stanza shall consist of eight verses ; each of the verses in every stanza shall begin with the same letter ; and there shall not be a single verse in the whole psalm which shall not contain one of the names by which the Divine Law is known among us. The task will be hard, but God will help me to achieve it. And the harder the task, the more it will prove how much I love his law."

Now when a man is so very ingenious, we are apt to suspect his ardour, and even his sincerity. And, indeed, the very inspiration of this psalm has been called in question on the express ground that it was not likely the wise holy Spirit of God would move a man to write a fanciful and elaborate alphabetical acrostic, that He would only use simpler and more genuine forms of literature. But we must remember both that love is sometimes fantastic, and that there are periods in which literature takes quaint and ingenious forms, without ceasing to be sincere. There was a time in our own

national history when very sincere and devout poets—such as Dr. Donne, and Quarles, and George Herbert, for example—expressed their devotion in very quaint and elaborate devices. Custom made that familiar to them which is strange to us; the fashion of the age gave that a charm which to us is unattractive and even repulsive: and though we have gained in simplicity, who will venture to affirm that we serve God with a devotion more profound, or love Him with an affection more sincere, than the holy men whose names I have just mentioned? For *us* to construct “emblems” like those of Quarles would be an absurd affectation; but it would be still more absurd were we to conclude them an affectation in him, and to take his quaintness as a proof of his insincerity.

A very true and genuine love may, therefore, express itself in quaint devices and elaborate ingenuities of form. And hence, despite the alphabetical and other ingenuities of this psalm, we may well believe that its unknown author had a sincere love for that Divine Law of which he sang. Although he did not “*walk in liberty*,” at least while composing his psalm, he, nevertheless, sought and loved God’s commandments. David, in Psalm xix., wrote a larger because a freer song on the same theme; but even in this cxix. Psalm there are many verses as beautiful in form as they are true in substance: the writer of it shews that he had solved many spiritual problems, mastered many spiritual secrets.

1. He had learned, for instance, that *to obey is to be free*; and this is a secret of the spiritual life of which, even in this late age, many good men have not possessed themselves. He affirms that *only as we seek God’s commandments do we walk in liberty*, or, “*walk at large*,” or, as the Hebrew phrases it, “*walk in a wide space*,” where there is nothing to check or hinder freedom of action. And, as we know, to “seek”

God's commandments is to "find" them ; for God is always found of them that seek Him. No sooner do we try to acquaint ourselves with his will, than we discover that we already know the rudiments and first elements of his will. No sooner do we know, or discover that we know, some parts of his will, than we seek to discover that which as yet we do not know. *Seekers to the end, we are finders from the first.* The further distances, the terminal miles of our journey, may be hidden from us ; but there is light where we walk, and we can see where our next step should be planted, and our next. As we climb the steep of duty, the broad table-land at the summit of the mountain—to which our God Himself is sun and moon—and much of the prospect on either hand, may be concealed from us by driving mists, which yet have a beauty of their own ; but, for a little distance onward, our path lies plainly before us, a track worn and smoothed by many feet, and at least the nearer prospect lies open to our view. If we are seeking God's commandments, we have found at least some of them, *at least those which bid us seek,* and are walking therein. And so far as we are walking in them, says the Psalmist, we walk in liberty. To obey is to be free.

Now there are many secrets of the spiritual life which sound very mysterious when put into words, but which, nevertheless, solve themselves quite easily and happily in our actual experience. When, for example, we hear that, in the kingdom of God, in the spiritual realm, *to serve is to rule,* or that *to lose is to gain,* or that *to suffer is to be blessed,* or that *to die is to live,* or that *to obey is to be free*—all these axioms, for they are axioms, of the spiritual life, sound like paradoxes and contradictions ; yet, if we accept them, and act upon them, we find that they are simply and accurately true. When we "serve" others, we find that we do "rule" both them and ourselves, that we can only serve them as

we rule and deny ourselves ; and that, by serving, we gain influence and authority with them. When we "lose" cheerfully much that we love, we find that we have "gained," and gained immensely, in force of character, in manliness, in consideration for our neighbours, in aspiration after higher and more enduring good. When we "suffer" patiently, our suffering is "blessed" to us ; we find that our sufferings have a cleansing and healing virtue, that to suffer is to be strong, that we can only reach the divinest joys as we pass to them through the dark avenues of sorrow and pain. When we "die" to sin, we "live" to righteousness ; when we "die" to self, we "live" unto God ; when we "die" out of time, we "live" in eternity. And, in like manner, when we "obey" we are "free" ; we find, by happy experience, that we are never so much our own men as when we keep God's commandments, that we never get so much of our own best will as when we do his will. Take the mere words, "We can be free only as we obey"—and they sound like a clear contradiction. But *act* on them, begin to keep God's commandments, and you find yourself, you know not how, in a happy liberty. The mystery clears off from them as you approach them. Life interprets and demonstrates the theorem that seemed paradoxical and absurd. *How* obedience sets us free may not be plain to our reason ; we may not be able to put it into words : nevertheless, we have tested and verified it for ourselves, and know it to be true. Life takes up the harp of thought, smites its trembling chords, and, lo ! all its murmuring and uncertain vibrations rise into clear musical tones, all its discords melt into harmony.

It is well, however, that the truths which Life interprets should become clear to Reason ; that we should be able to put into words what we have put into our deeds, and found to be true, though once it seemed not true. And if we once get the clue, there really is no difficulty whatever in seeing,

or in saying, how it comes to pass that obedience is the only path to freedom.

No doubt this axiom, simple as it is, puzzles us all at times, and especially when we are young, and have not sat long in the school of experience. Then, our conceptions of "law" and "liberty" being as yet unperfect, we think of them as opposites. Law is restraint; liberty is freedom from restraint, and therefore freedom from law. How, then, can we rise through obedience to law into liberty? This problem, I say, sadly perplexes those who are young in thought, however old they may be in years; although the answer to it is so obvious that one wonders how they can miss it.

For consider: if you want to master any art or craft, must you not serve and obey that you may master it? If you want to be a mechanic or an artist, you find that every craft, every art, has its rules, which rules are simply the results of long experience; they simply point out the easiest and best methods of—making a chair, let us say, or painting a picture. How are you to become a good carpenter or a good painter? By obeying those rules, or by disobeying them?—by using your tools or your brushes as the whim of the moment prompts, or by learning to use them according to the laws which wisdom and experience have laid down? You know very well that you must study and obey those rules, that you must faithfully and patiently serve them, if you would become masters in your art or craft. You know very well that, if you would become what we may call a *free* carpenter or a *free* painter,—if, that is, you would do your work freely and happily, without so much as once thinking of the rules you nevertheless observe,—you can only rise to that freedom by having obeyed the rules so long and well that your obedience has come to be unconscious, automatic, and you do your work as one who follows an

inward instinct rather than as one who keeps an outward law.

It really does not matter into what province of life we go; everywhere the axiom holds good that obedience is the only path to liberty. Look, for example, at that boy sitting at his school-desk, with the pen in his unaccustomed fingers. With what difficulty he frames a few letters, looking ever at his copy, blotting his book, inking his fingers; his straight strokes a waving line, his curves irregular angles, his whole body painfully sympathizing with his laborious hand, even to the tongue, which makes strokes and curves within his mouth. What a task is his! how many rules has he to observe! how often do his tears fall with his ink on the blotted page! and what a tyranny it seems that his natural liberty should be curtailed, and that he should be compelled to drudge at that weary work when he would so fain be playing in the fields! Yet only thus, only by long and painful observance of rules, can he become a rapid and masterly penman, writing without a thought of rule and filling his page with words that cost him no labour.

Or take a family, a household. What care and pains, and courage, are required to gain freedom here! How many rules must be observed, how strictly and patiently and kindly they must be enforced; how often must the children conquer their natural longings, how often must the parents deny the first indulgent impulses of love in order to shew a truer and deeper kindness. If the domestic rules are neglected, if parents and children follow the whim or mood of the moment, what comes of such neglect but despised authority, wasteful disorder, and ruinous disobedience? The ordered freedom of the household is broken into anarchy and confusion; parents and children sink into bondage to self-will and passion.

Or take a nation. Which is *free*—the nation in which

every man does that which is right in his own eyes, or the nation in which obedience to public law and unselfish devotion to the common weal have become an instinct of the blood? How long did we and our fathers serve and obey before we became fit and able to rule the vast empire which now obeys this sovereign people!

Everywhere, then, in all provinces and departments of human life, there is no liberty but the liberty of obedience; we can only "walk at large" as we "seek"—that is, as we keep, and continue to keep—God's commandments. And the axiom holds good *in the spiritual* as in all other provinces of life. Here, in this spiritual province, the end pursued is that we may become like God, the great perfect Spirit, that we may become good and pure and kind as He is; that, like Him, we may become perfect in kindness and purity and goodness. For the attainment of this end certain rules or laws are laid down, which rules God has revealed to us in the words and lives of the holy men who were before us, and, above all, in the words and life of his only perfect Son. These rules embody both the wisdom of God, and the experience of the wisest and best of men, who have tried them and found them come true. They must be good rules, therefore; they must be infallible rules, although our interpretation of them may be imperfect. And we can only rise into spiritual life, and secure its end, as we obey these rules. If we would rise into *free* spiritual life, we must study and obey them till we can observe them as by an inward spiritual instinct, without thought and without pain.

Mark how the skilled mason builds a house with a labour that is pleasant to him, and no longer irksome. He can whistle and sing, and laugh and talk, over his work; yet all the while his cunning dexterous hand is busy, and his heart takes satisfaction and a wholesome pride in the ease and certainty with which his work is done. *The law of his work*

*is in his heart*, and therefore none of his strokes fail. The law is in his heart, made his by long obedience, and therefore he walks and works "at large." And only when, in like manner, the statutes of God have become our songs, shall we build up the edifice of spiritual character with happy freedom, in perfect liberty.

Thus, then, we may see, as well as feel, that obedience is freedom. The paradox—to obey is to be free—becomes as clear to our Reason as it is true to our Faith and Experience.

2. But the passage suggests another line of thought. Our whole life is under law to God, and to keep the law is to be free. But, as *we* apprehend our life, there is much in it which does not come under any precise and formulated law. Between the things we ought to do, and the things we ought not to do, there lies a large province of what we call "things indifferent,"—things, that is, which one man may rightly do, and another may just as rightly not do; a large province in which, to our apprehension at least, the Divine law does not run, or runs with a wavering and uncertain authority. There are many actions which, as St. Paul reminds us, some good men hold to be sinful, and to these they are sinful; yet to other equally good men these same actions do not seem sinful, and to these they are not sinful. In his time, this debatable province of things, this spiritual no-man's land, this tract which lay beyond the scope of definite law, consisted of questions about Sabbaths and feasts, about meats offered to idols and sold in markets, about marriage and celibacy. In our day, this dubious province of thought and action includes questions of what may and may not be done on Sundays, about dress and conformity to fashion, about what books should or should not be read, about what amusements are lawful and what unlawful. There are still weak brethren, and, oh! how many weak

sisters, in the Church to whom these questions are of the gravest moment ; and there are still strong brethren and sisters who can hardly discuss them with gravity. But on one point we are all deeply concerned, whether we be weak or strong—viz., that we ascertain what should be our ruling principle and what our animating spirit in relation to these doubtful disputations. For we may be very sure that, even in this province, God's law does run, though we cannot always clearly discern it ; we may be very sure that it is not indifferent to *Him* how we handle even things indifferent.

And here the Psalmist helps us with a suggestion. He suggests that, in this dubious and debatable province of things indifferent, as everywhere else, only those can "walk at large" who are seeking God's commandments. There are many persons weakly good, and whom God is trying to make stronger, that He may make them better, who really do *not* seek his commandments. How should they *seek* for what they hold, or think they hold, in their hand ? They believe in Christ,—at least they believe the little they know about Him ; they try to do his will,—at least what little they know of his will. But they do not much care to know more ; they do not study his Word with intelligent and earnest devotion, seeking to acquaint themselves with the whole counsel of his will. They are much occupied with trifles, or with truisms, with the first rudiments of the faith, with the few dogmas with which they are already familiar, or with the forms and observances, the maxims and rules, which they find helpful to their weakness ; and they shrink from aught that sounds new or large or strong. They carry a tiny lantern in their hand, often a *dark* lantern, though the true light burns in it, by whose aid they painfully pick their steps along a path they would fear to walk were they not accustomed to it. Their lantern casts *shadows* on their companions, or a light which only partly illuminates them, so that they often mis-

judge even those who walk by their side ; and if any of these, with stronger feet, and seeing the path more clearly, should take a swifter pace and go before them, they are both offended and dismayed. Their friends are leaving *them*, and therefore they must be leaving the true path. Their friends are using a liberty which *they* never permit themselves, and therefore they must be breaking through the hedge of the commandments. *They* cannot read profound or sceptical books without injury, and therefore no good man will read them—no, not even those whose duty it is to test or to confute them. *They* cannot talk brightly, or take a pleasant walk, or listen to sweet music on Sunday, without losing the devout spirit they brought with them from church ; and therefore it is sinful to talk brightly, or to walk through the fields—even though they be “cornfields,”—or to enjoy the concord of sweet sounds. *They* cannot go into a certain kind of society, or indulge in certain amusements, without being conformed to this present world ; and therefore no sincere Christian can go into it or partake its recreations.

Now these weak brethren and sisters are quite right ; and yet they are altogether wrong. The rules they would impose on others may be very good rules *for them*, and probably are good for them. If they cannot seek God and his commandments,—that is, if they cannot find God and keep his commandments, in certain societies, occupations, amusements,—beyond all question they *should* abstain from them ; and their stronger brethren, so far from despising them, should honour them for their abstinence. But they must not make their weakness a law for strength. If they are humble as well as weak—and who should be humble and self-distrustful if not the infirm?—they will not demand, they will not desire, to give the time and to measure out the stride by which the whole army of the living God is to order its march. They will, rather, smilingly bid the strong go

forward and conquer new provinces of thought and action for God, while they bring up the rear, or "tarry with the stuff." Their lantern may be both little and dark, yet it may hold the true light; and they do well to walk by the light it sheds: but they must not mistake their lantern for the sun, and fret and fume if the whole Church does not walk by its beams. It may be day for others, while it is still dusk with them. And if the night still linger over us all, there are other and even larger lanterns than theirs, strange and incredible as that may seem to them. There are stars as well as lanterns, and the wise may guide their course by a star when the simple need a lamp.

Those who sincerely seek God's commandments may safely walk at large, though only these. If in things indifferent, as in all things else, they make it their supreme aim to find God and do his will, they will not go astray: He will suffer none of their steps to slip, although they walk in untrammelled freedom.

Two men are sent to a distant city. One longs, with an undivided heart, to be there; the other would like indeed to be there, but would almost as soon go somewhere else. To the second of these men it may be wise to give careful guidance and stringent commands; to bid him take this road and then that, to forbid him to linger in any too pleasant spot by the way. But you need not give such commands to the first of the two, or bind *him* with rules and prohibitions. You may leave him to find the road for himself, to pause where he will, to gather what flowers and take what refreshment he will by the way; for you are very sure that he will not waste time, nor linger unduly by the way, nor stop short of his destination. *He may safely walk at large who seeks, and seeks first, the city and kingdom of God.*

Two men start up a mountain. The one has heard of

the glorious prospect to be seen from the summit, till an overmastering desire to behold it has drawn him from his common round and daily task. The other would like to see the prospect well enough, but he is fond of flowers and ferns, rocks and streams ; he loves valleys as well as hills, loves rest above all. *He* therefore may need to have rules and orders, to be forbidden to leave an appointed track, or to amuse himself by gathering the sweet mountain grasses and flowers, or to repose save at certain prescribed halting-places and for definite periods of time. But you need lay down no rules for the other. *He* will not dally with the flowers, though he may pick one now and then and be refreshed with its odour ; nor will he linger by the streams, though he may now and then sip of their pure waters. *He* will not leave the path, except it be to take a steeper yet shorter way. *He* will not lie lapped in drowsy slumbers till the day be past, nor let occasion slip. You may trust *him* to “walk at large ;” for he seeks the prospect : and his strong desire will carry him on, and up, till he reach the summit of the mountain and looks down on the broad and varied scenes beneath his feet.

And, in like manner, a weak Christian who loves God, but also loves the world ; a weak brother who wishes to do God’s will, but would like to have his own will too, who cares almost as much for business as for worship ; or a weak sister who loves her children or her husband at least as well as she loves the Saviour ; or who tries to keep a few commandments, but hardly cares to know more, lest she should have to keep these too,—such an one needs rules, needs stringent commands and prohibitions, needs to be forbidden this society or that, needs to have this affection weakened or that. But a strong Christian, who loves God so sincerely and supremely that he has given up much for God’s sake and the Gospel’s, who earnestly studies God’s

Word that he may acquaint himself with the whole counsel of God's will, and who holds high above all other aims the ambition to grow like Christ and to serve Him,—*he* may be left to walk in liberty. Because he seek's God's commandments, because he takes God and the love of God wherever he goes, he may go where he will. Because he seeks, in all he does, to do it as to God, he may do what he will. We need not fetter *him* with the rules which our weakness makes very requisite and serviceable for *us*. We cannot judge him without condemning ourselves. We cannot check him without injuring ourselves. He is climbing the mountain on which our feet stand, but he is far before us; we cannot see him clearly, nor what he does, nor why he does it. To us he may seem to be indolently standing still, when he is climbing stoutly upward, or is only pausing for a moment to select the best line to take. He may even seem to us to have left the clear and direct line of ascent, but it may be that he has only left it to avoid some peril which we cannot discern, or to help a fallen and wearied brother, to reclaim the erring, or to put his strength at the service of weakness. Let us not judge him any more. We know that he loves and seeks God's commandments; he may have given such proof of that as *we* cannot give yet: and, knowing that, let us leave him, with our prayers and good wishes, to walk in the freedom wherewith God has made him free.

And thus we arrive once more at the old conclusion of charity. Let the strong consider and help the weak; but let not the weak hinder and judge the strong. Nay, let us all, whether strong or weak, take hands, and walk together as far as we can; and, when we must part, let the strong go forward to make an easier path for the weak, while the weak, in their turn, help the strong with their cordial good

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wishes and prayers : until, at last, we all come to that happy kingdom in which weakness is unknown, and *all* walk at large because all both seek and find the commandments of God.

## VI.

## Ordinances and Obedience.

JEREMIAH vii. 22, 23.

THIS, surely, is a very singular passage ; and the more we study it, the more singular it grows. It is charged with contradictions, or apparent contradictions. It is full of the paradoxes which exact attention and stimulate thought. It is not true, for instance ; and yet it is quite true. It is utterly alien to the spirit of the Hebrew revelation ; and yet it is in entire harmony with that spirit. It makes forms of no religious value whatever ; and yet it also makes them of the very greatest value. Here, surely, are paradoxes—paradoxes which compel thought and will repay it. Let us consider them as briefly as we may.

1. Our first paradox is : *that these words are not true, and yet that they are quite true.* Well, now, *are they true ?* God, by his prophet, distinctly affirms that, when He brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, He said nothing to them concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices. But if you turn to the Sacred History, you will hear God Himself saying a good deal about sacrifices and offerings. It was God who put this demand into the mouth of the Hebrew captives : “ Let us go that we may *sacrifice* unto the Lord our God.” The whole contention between Moses and Pharaoh turned on this very point,—Moses demanding permission for his brethren to go three days’ journey into the wilderness for the express

purpose of offering sacrifices to God, and Pharaoh refusing the permission, or conceding it, only to revoke it. Nay, on the very day on which the Hebrew fathers came up out of Egypt, God commanded them to slay a lamb, to eat part of it, and to burn the rest with fire ; and this offering was afterwards formulated into the Paschal Feast, the greatest sacrificial festival of the Hebrew year. Of course it is quite open to us to argue, if we care to argue it, that this slaying and eating and burning of a lamb, though it looks like a sacrifice and became a sacrifice, was not at first a sacrifice in the technical sense, since it was not offered by a priest in a temple. But God is not a pedant that He should palter with words in a double sense, and evade their plain meaning by an appeal to technicalities. Were we thus to "respect his person," and to vindicate his ways by betaking ourselves to the shifts and evasions of the Schools—that would be to insult, not to honour, Him. Let any plain man read the history of the Exodus, taking words in their obvious sense, and he will feel quite sure that God *did* speak to the fathers and command them concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices, in the day that He brought them out of the land of Egypt. And men must not lie for God.

But God says that He *did not* speak to them about sacrifices and burnt-offerings ! If we must not lie for God, will He lie to us ? Nay, let God be true, though every man were a liar. And God *is* true. We shall know Him to be true if we only consider what He means when He says that He did not speak to the Hebrew fathers of the sacrifices of which we know that He did speak to them. What He means is simply this : That the elaborate ritual of the Jewish tabernacle, its orderly and interminable series of sacrifices and offerings, was not established then, and that they got on perfectly well without it.

Remember what the Jews were to whom Jeremiah pro-

phesied. They were immoral formalists, whose worship was an organized hypocrisy. They scrupulously observed rites and ceremonies ; and went from the Temple to oppress the stranger, to rob the widow and the orphan. Nay, they turned the House of God into a robber's den, and shed innocent blood even within the sacred precincts (see verses 6, 9, 11). Yet because they entered the gates of worship, because they stood before the altar, because they offered sacrifices and tithed even the herbs of their gardens, because, in short, they scrupulously observed certain ritualistic forms, they accounted themselves the special favourites of Heaven. They substituted ritualism for morality. They did not, they would not, understand that ritualism, save as a part of morality, was an offence to God. The elaborate ceremonies of the Temple were their pride ; apart from these there was no salvation.

How were such men to be reached ? It was of no use to argue with them on the general principles of the Divine Government, for they held themselves to be an exception to the general rule. It was of no use to draw warning and rebuke from the history of other races ; they were a peculiar people. The one thing that could be done for them was to bring them argument and rebuke from the history of their fathers, from the history of the very men from whom they had received the rites in which they put their trust. And this God did for them by his prophet. In effect Jeremiah said to them, " You hold that your ceremonialism atones your immorality ; that only by observing authentic forms of worship can men win the favour of Heaven. And yet the special boast of your history is the mighty wonders by which your fathers were redeemed from the bondage of Egypt. Then, if ever, God came out of his place to bestow the most signal favours on man. Yet these men, the most favoured of your favoured race, had no temple, no tabernacle ; they

were not allowed to worship Jehovah, or why should they ask leave to go a three days' journey into the wilderness that they might worship Him? *They* were destitute of the very forms on the observance of which you conceive the Divine favour to depend. Yet God favoured them as He has never favoured you. By the most stupendous miracles He delivered them from their captivity, led them dryshod through the paths of the sea, gave them bread from heaven, slaked their thirst with water from a rock. Without a sanctuary, without a priesthood, without a ritual, they enjoyed the extraordinary favour of Heaven. How, then, can the Divine favour depend on what they had not, on ceremonies, on priestly ministrations, on liturgical forms? They, your own fathers, had none of these until they reached the Mount that burned with fire: yet before they reached the Mount the most signal and splendid proofs of the Divine complacency were lavished upon them! All that time God spake not to your fathers, nor commanded them concerning the burnt-offerings and sacrifices in which exclusively you now trust. All He said to them was, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk in all the ways I have commanded you, and it shall be well with you."

These words, then, although, if taken literally and by themselves, they are not true, are nevertheless strictly true both in their substance and in their spirit.

2. Our second paradox is: that *these words are alien to the spirit of the Hebrew Revelation, and yet are in complete harmony with that spirit*. We do not expect great breadth or liberality of thought in a Jew, even in an inspired Jew. There was much in the Hebrew revelation to foster the exclusive temper which marked this singular race throughout its history. They were taught to regard themselves as a chosen race, a peculiar people. They were set apart from,

by being set above, all other nations. Descendants of God's friend, God talked with them, as He had talked with him, face to face. And because they were ignorant and immature, God spoke to them in pictorial symbols, in scenic representations, in expressive ceremonies. He dwelt among them as a king among his subjects, the miraculous Shekinah being the visible sign of his presence. He must have his palace (the tabernacle), his train of ministers (the priests), his table with its constant bountiful supply (the altar and its sacrifices), and a daily service in his honour. All the energies and resources of the Jews gathered to this sacred centre: the outward and visible service of an outward and visible Presence grew to be the sum and substance of their religion. To do the will of their Lord and King in the home, in the market, in distant villages and towns—what was that as compared with standing in his very presence, contributing to the splendour of his retinue, observing the etiquette of his court, taking part in the honours of his service?

Nor can we deny that the Hebrew Scriptures lay great stress both on the national exclusive privileges of the chosen race, and on the necessity of a strict and minute attention to the forms by which their King was served. Look at the elaborate details of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy; at the importance attached to the building of the Tabernacle and the Temple in the Historical Books; at the ecstasies of the Psalmists as they walk about Zion or spend a day in its courts; at the rebukes of the Prophets so often as the Temple is suffered to fall into disrepair, or the magnificent ritual is shorn of its glory. The whole Hebrew Bible seems to be occupied with the House of God and the service of its courts. And at first it comes upon us as a profound surprise that a prophet should speak in tones of contempt concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices, that he should rate them as of

little worth when compared with the morality of obedience to a spiritual law. "This," we say, "is not the spirit of the Hebrew Bible : from whom, or what, could any Hebrew have learned such catholicity of thought ?"

But when we look at the Hebrew Bible more carefully, we find that that which seemed altogether alien to its spirit perfectly accords with it. Everywhere, beneath the surface, we come on traces of a deeper broader purpose than any the Jews cared to find in it. Under all that is national and exclusive in it, we discover an universal law ; under all that is ceremonial, the purest spirituality. It is not only that whole books, such as Job and Ecclesiastes, have a place in the Hebrew Canon, although they deal with questions which touch the general human heart, and are free from any savour of ritualism. It is not only that through the superficial Hebrew strata there perpetually crop up passages which, like that before us, speak of the foundations of *the world*, rather than of the character of a country or a province. Besides all this, there is throughout the Hebrew Bible a constant recognition of the God of the Jews as the God of the whole earth ; there is a constant affirmation that, if "salvation is of the Jews," it is *for* all men. Everywhere we find, or may find, it either stated or implied that in the seed of Abraham there is a blessing for all the families of man ; that they are chosen, not for their own sakes simply, but that in them God may set forth a pattern of his long-suffering patience and of the grace which is to all and upon all. The supreme end of his various dealings with the stiffnecked Jewish race is kept steadfastly before us ; and the end is, that all flesh may see the salvation of God and rejoice together. As we study the Old Testament and acquaint ourselves with its real meaning, it grows like a river on whose surface slight currents, raised by passing gusts, sweep to and fro, and sometimes even seem to mount toward its source, but whose

main tide nevertheless flows on toward the wide sea which washes all shores. Through all the play of a superficial nationalism and exclusiveness and ceremonialism, we see the broad mighty current of the Divine Love, which bears all men and all nations in its bosom, sweeping on to its rest; and though for a time the stream reflect the shadows of temple, and priest, and sacrifice, we feel that, should these pass away, its volume will not be lessened, that the life-giving waters will but flow more purely when they are no longer vexed by shadows nor polluted with blood.

The text, therefore, though it seems at variance with the very spirit of the Hebrew Revelation, is in perfect accord with it.

3. Our third paradox is: that *these words make religious forms of no value whatever, and yet they make them of the very greatest value.*

Jeremiah introduces Jehovah as speaking of burnt-offerings and sacrifices with a certain large contempt. Men did very well without them once, and may do very well without them again. The Divine favour does not depend on them; they are not indispensable to salvation. Now this would be very surprising doctrine to a Jew; and I think we should feel some sympathy with him were he to turn upon the Prophet with the reply, "Well, really, this is too bad. Here have you and your like been teaching us for a thousand years to put the House of God and its ordinances first. Our national life, through all its habits, has been shaped in deference to your message. The Temple and its services have absorbed a whole tribe, much of our wealth, of our flocks and herds, of our very thoughts and affections. And now you coolly inform us that we might as well have kept all that we have expended on them, that God does not care a jot for all the sacrifice we have made!"

It would be natural, I say, for a Jew to turn upon the Prophet thus, to put *this* construction upon his words, and to resent them. But did Jeremiah mean what such a Jew would take him to mean? Are his words fairly open to such a construction as this? Surely not. He does not say that forms are of no worth; but that forms are of no worth as compared with obedience. His thesis is, that forms without obedience will not save a man, while obedience without forms will save a man. What he means is that "to obey is better than to sacrifice, and to hearken" to the Divine law "better than" to offer "the fat of rams." Ritualism is not religion, but only one of the many forms which religion assumes. Temple, and priest, and sacrifice may pass away, but obedience remains; and obedience to the Divine commands is the very substance and life of religion.

This is Jeremiah's doctrine. And of course it is a very comfortable doctrine to those who have not as yet observed the Christian ordinances to do them. Pray take the full comfort of it—if you can. When you say, as some do say, "After all, the great thing is to do God's will in our daily life; outward forms are of no value as compared with obedience:" when you say *that*, you simply express the profound and growing conviction of the Church. The Bible itself is on your side so often as you affirm, "When God redeemed men by the grace of Christ, He spake not nor commanded them concerning rites and ordinances; but *this* He commanded, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people; and walk ye in all the ways I have commanded you, that it may be well with you." It is impossible to deny that such an affirmation is a fair paraphrase of the Prophet's words, a fair and rational application of them to your position. I for one have no wish to deny

it. Obedience is better than sacrifice ; to do one's duty by one's neighbour is the true ritualism, the best. And those of us who care very little for outward religious forms may be very sure that, if we are trying to do our duty by our neighbour and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, we are aiming at that pure and undefiled ritualism, and are offering that reasonable service, which God approves and will accept.

But before we go further, let us make quite certain of our ground. Our supreme aim should be "to do our duty in our daily life : " but is not Sunday one of our days ? are not its duties a part of our duty ? Do you reply, " What an absurd question ! Of course Sunday is one of the days of our week, and its duties a part, and a very pleasant part, of our duty." The question is not so absurd as it sounds. There are some folk who, when speaking of their duty to God, quietly drop all the week-days out of their thoughts. *They* assume that God has little to do with their secular life ; that what He cares for is the worship of the Sanctuary and, what they call, the Sabbath. But, on the other hand, there are persons who, when *they* speak of their duty to God, think only, or mainly, of their duties in the world and on the six working-days of the week. *They* mean that they should try to speak the truth, to act honestly, to feel kindly, in the home, in the shop, in the factory or the counting-house. Oddly enough, *they* drop Sunday and the Church out of their reckoning, or do not keep these clearly before them. Sunday is their day of rest ; *i.e.*, the day on which they may relax a little from the hard task of duty and be at ease. The Church is at most a place in which they may be pleasantly instructed or soothed, not a place in which they are to labour and to deny themselves. They do not feel that the House of God has the same kind of claim upon them that the home has or the factory, that its services are just as

binding on them as the labours of their daily business. They are often absent from it for reasons which would not keep them from their week-day work: they say, "We are *bound* to go to business; we cannot neglect that," but they do not feel that they are equally *bound* to wait upon the Lord in his House. The tasks by which they win bread for the body are obligatory upon them; the ordinances by which they nourish the life of the spirit are not obligatory, although, if you put it to them, they frankly admit that the life is more than meat, and the spirit more than the flesh. Inverting the true order, they practically assume that they may neglect the spirit, but not the body; the Church, but not the world; God, but not man. And therefore, if any of you have fallen into this way of thought, you will do well to consider whether you *can* be doing your duty in your daily life, if you drop one day in seven out of your account, and that the day which God has specially reserved for his service. You will do well to consider whether you can be doing your duty if you neglect any duties which God has laid upon you, and, above all, if you neglect the very duties by which your spirits are specially prepared for his eternal service and joy.

Again: we must not treat the passage unfairly, even that we may justify or excuse ourselves. It is quite fair, as I have said, to affirm that when God redeemed men He said nothing about rites and ordinances, but bade them obey his voice and walk in his ways. It is quite fair to say, therefore, that obedience is and must be better than any observance of forms. But it is not fair to deny, or to forget, that the observance of forms may be a part of obedience. If at any time God has said, and said to you, "Be baptized for the remission of your sins," or, "Do this in remembrance of me," or, "Rest from your labours on my day and worship me in my House,"—are not these commandments binding

on you? Are you obeying God's voice if you do not observe these ordinances? Are you walking in all the ways which He commanded you, if you are not walking in these commandments?

I fear that the ground on which we stood a while ago is not so solid as it seemed, that it trembles ominously beneath our weight. Religious forms may be transient, changeable, revocable; but, so long as they last, they are binding on us, if at least we know that God has appointed them. To obey God is to be religious; but ritualism, in so far as it expresses his will, is part of our religion. Morality is far above all ordinances; but we have not the true morality so long as we neglect any Divine command: for what is our morality but a doing of the Divine Will?

If, then, we neglect public worship, or do not put it on at least as high a level as our other duties; if we do not come to the Lord's Supper, or if we take no part in the distinctive labours of the Church; and if, as a reason for our non-observance of these duties and forms, we plead that we are trying to do our duty in the world, and that forms are nothing as compared with a good life, we expose ourselves to the reply, "Have you no duty to the Church as well as to the world? How *can* you be doing your duty, or even trying to do it, when there are duties which you make no effort to discharge? Religious ordinances, Church duties, are part of a good life, since they are imposed upon us, for our good, by the authority of God Himself.

If any one object: "But I don't see the good of them!" the retort is obvious, "Probably God does, or He would not have enjoined them: and are you wiser than God?"

If any one should object: "But who is the Lord that I should do as He bids?" he opens a new and larger subject on which we cannot enter now, and need not, since those now addressed do not dispute the Divine authority. *You*

admit that, if God has appointed certain religious forms, He has ordained them for your good, that He may teach and comfort and strengthen you so often as you observe them. *You* admit that the worship of his House, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, are such forms, and that they are more or less binding on all who love Him. But nevertheless you may have a feeling that these forms are not of any great moment after all, that it lies very much at your option or your convenience whether you observe them or do not observe them; that your non-observance of them is of no importance so long as you try to do your duty and to live a good life. It is this obscure persuasion, this unavowed feeling, I believe, which is fast emptying our Sanctuaries and in every way weakening our Churches. Good Christian men, or men who are sincerely endeavouring to be good on the Christian rule, are influenced by it; and under its influence are relaxing their use of the means of grace. On all hands we hear the complaint, that those who were wont to be punctual as the hour are growing irregular and infrequent in their attendance on public worship; that men are so steeped in worldly business, and so wearied by it, that they have neither time nor energy for the service of the Church. This, the non-observance of religious forms by religious persons, is the danger and the sin of the present time. And in great measure probably it springs from the broader and more generous views of truth which have of late found acceptance among us. We have learned to hold that obedience is better than sacrifice, till at last we have come to think there need be no sacrifice in our obedience; that God demands no service of us which entails personal inconvenience or worldly loss. And therefore we need to be reminded of the real meaning of one of the first principles of the Faith. "Obedience better than sacrifice" is a principle, a fundamental principle of the Faith of Christ. It cuts

sheer through hypocrisy and formalism. But the keener the principle, the more deeply we may wound ourselves with it, if we mishandle it. And we are mishandling this principle if we use it to justify any neglect of any Divine command. We are not doing our duty while we consciously neglect any duty. We are not obeying God's voice so long as we refuse "to hearken and do" in respect to any of his commandments. We are not living so good a life as we might and ought to live so long as we turn away from any means of grace He offers us.

Religious ordinances, though they are of little worth as compared with spiritual obedience, are nevertheless the most accurate and delicate tests of obedience. *Moral* commandments carry their own sanction with them. When God says, "Thou shalt not lie, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not murder," we have no doubt that we ought to listen to his voice: we are quite sure that it will not be well with us if we disobey it. But the sanction and obligation of ordinances is not so obvious. When the Divine commandment means, "Go to Church," or "Take the Supper of the Lord," even a good man may doubt whether it is essential to his well-being that he should obey. He may think, and think quite sincerely, that it will be better for him to lie a-bed, or to take a walk, or to talk to his children, than to go to God's House: he may think that it would be no real help to him to eat and drink with Christ. And here for him lies the true value of ordinances. Precisely because they do not commend themselves to him as moral laws do, precisely because he does not think them essential to his moral welfare, they are the critical, the crucial, tests of his obedience. God says to him, "This, and that, will be good for you." Says the man, "I really don't think they will; I can find something better to do." But if he is really of a Christian spirit, he will soon add, "After all, God must know best;

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and therefore I will take my law from his mouth, and bow my will to his." If, then, *you* have neglected the ordinances of God's House, because you have not seen how you should be the better for observing them, your obedience has been put to the most delicate of all tests, and has failed. You have taken your own way instead of God's, because you did not see that his way was best. So long as you could walk by sight as you followed Him, you were content to keep his paths: but the very moment *faith* was demanded of you, and you were called to tread a path the end of which you could not discern, your heart failed you, and you refused to trust in God. Retrace your steps. Redeem the opportunities that remain. If you admit that God has invited you to join the fellowship of his Son, and commanded you to come to the Lord's table, obey his voice, and walk in the ways which He has commanded you. And it shall be well with you; for God will be your God, and *ye* shall be his people.

## VII.

## The Secret of Constancy in Christian Work.

## AD CLERUM.

## JEREMIAH xx. 9.

1. JEREMIAH is the Cassandra in "the goodly fellowship of the prophets:" like Cassandra, he foresaw a doom which he was powerless to avert, predicted the destruction of the very house whose blood ran in his veins, and knew the pain of finding his warnings disregarded as the mere ravings of a religious frenzy. Of the feminine rather than of the masculine type of character, he, above all the other prophets, had to speak evil from the Lord, and not good. Sensitive to the faintest shadows of wrong, and instantly foreboding the disasters they portended, he was more disposed to lament than to "take up arms" against them, to sing dirges than to attempt a reformation. Nothing was more terrible to him than to see his people sin against the Divine Law, except it were to assume the functions of the prophet and denounce their sins. Fain to be silent, when he does speak, it is under the pressure of an excitement which lends the shrill tones of passion and exaggeration to his words. As you listen to him you feel that he is forced, by an influence he cannot control, into a publicity utterly distasteful to him; that, if left to himself, he would rather mourn in secret and apart than stand forth to vindicate and avenge the vio-

lated law. As he is compelled to speak, his modest sensitive spirit revenges itself by hurrying him into the most daring, passionate, and extravagant utterances.

From the very first he shrinks from the prophetic vocation. He fears, he falters as he *enters* the cloud of the Divine Presence. The word of the Lord came to him in early days,\* saying, "I have sanctified and ordained thee a prophet." To this separating call† he had replied, "Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak; I am but a child!" He never loses this profound sense of unfitness for the work. To him it is nothing short of a calamity that he of all men should have been chosen for it and called to it. He invokes God Himself‡ to witness his reluctance: "I have not hastened from being a shepherd to follow Thee, neither have I desired the woful day, Thou knowest." And this sense of being called to a vocation for which he was naturally unfit, was a constant stimulus to him, a perpetual spur, as it was sure to be to a delicate, conscientious, and apprehensive nature. No prophet paints with darker colours, or staggers under a "burden" so heavy and oppressive. No prophet addresses to the Almighty language so audacious, and, but for the passionate fidelity from which it sprang, so blasphemous. At one time§ he exclaims against God, "Thou hast filled me with indignation. Wilt Thou be unto me altogether as a liar, and as waters that fail?" At another time|| he complains, "O Lord, Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived!" The man is full of these wild impassioned utterances. His speech is not large and calm, but rash and shrill; it jets and pulses wildly, like an intermittent volcanic spring, which scorches the neighbouring ground, instead of flowing gently, like a fountain which carries an added life

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\* Jeremiah i. 5.

§ Jeremiah xv. 17, 18.

† Jeremiah i. 6.

|| Jeremiah xx. 7.

‡ Jeremiah xvii. 16.

and beauty through the green fruitful valley. If he *must* speak, he will speak out all that is in him; his fears and scepticisms, his quick angers and misgivings, his daring distrust and hot resentment, as well as his tender solitudes and the loyalties of faith and love.

Now in such a spirit as this there will, of course, be perpetual fluctuation; unreasonable depressions will tread on the heels of undue excitements: quick subtle revulsions of feeling will fleet to and fro, breaking the current of life into troubled waves, sweeping the waves at times into vehement storm, and causing them to cast up, not only amber and pearls, but also mire and dirt. The Prophet's heart knows no rest. It wavers and oscillates, and hangs in doubtful momentary poise. In his moments of inspiration, he is raised above his ordinary level; when these cease, he sinks as much below it, the height to which he soars being the measure of the depth to which he falls. More than one instance of this rapid characteristic fluctuation may be found in the chapter before us. Towards the close of it,\* for instance, the Prophet breaks out into singing; God's word is the joy and rejoicing of his heart; all men must sing with him, and praise the Lord. And then, in the very next verse,† he suddenly breaks out into cursing; he bans the day on which he was born, and passionately demands wherefore he was brought into the world only "to see labour and sorrow," and to have his days "consumed with shame." So also, in the text, he affirms in the same breath both that he will not any more speak the word of the Lord and that he cannot but speak it.

Here, then, we surely have a somewhat singular prophet; a prophet whose speech and conduct do not exactly fall within the orderly lines which limit our conception of the holy men

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\* Jeremiah xx. 13.

† Jeremiah xx. 14.

who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. As we listen to some of his shriller utterances, we may be disposed to ask, "Why did God choose for his prophet a man so weak, so impulsive, so passionate? How could any man, and much more an inspired man, charge God so foolishly, and talk in so wild and heedless a way?"

My brethren: it is a law of the Divine Kingdom that weak things should be chosen to overcome the mighty, and that wisdom should be brought to nought by folly. The very weakness of Jeremiah would in some sort adapt him to his work. A prophet who strove against the Spirit that was in him; a hesitating reluctant prophet, from whose faltering lips there fell words set between groans of remonstrance and appeal;—he manifestly was speaking no word of his own, but a word given him from above. It was the wise strong God who spoke through the weak foolish man, and spoke all the more obviously because the man *was* foolish and weak, and shrank from delivering the message with which he was charged.

And if to the men of his generation the Prophet's weakness proved the power to be of God, has it no teaching for us? Surely it has. For if Holy Scripture shewed us only *perfect* men, what chance or hope would there be for us? If God would only put his word into a pure heart, and suffer the breath of his inspiration to pass across the large wise brain, how should *we* dare to speak for Him?

He chose weak and foolish men in the old time, not simply that "the excellency of the glory might be seen to be of Him," but also that we, although we also are foolish and weak, might know that He will dwell with us, and breathe his word into our hesitating and imperfect hearts.

"Yes," it may be said, "that is a very gracious and consolatory inference. It is well we should feel that, despite our petulance and folly, God will give us his word and his

Spirit. But Jeremiah—does not he carry petulance and distrust too far? He charges God with having deceived him; he even asks whether God means to be altogether as a liar unto him. Would any good man, however weak, go so far as that?" I can conceive that this question may be asked, and that those who ask it may even find some comfort in the thought that, however hard they have been driven, they have never spoken to God in that wild wicked way. But, my brethren, have you never *made* God a liar? have you never acted as if his words were not true? You are singularly happy if you have not. And if you have, remember that to ask Jeremiah's question can hardly be so wicked as to act out an affirmative answer to it: remember that to *say* to God, "Wilt Thou be a liar to me?" is not so wicked as to behave as though God were a liar.

Moreover, we must bear in mind how it was that the Prophet came to ask a question so audacious. God had compelled him, sorely against the grain, to speak words which, so far as he could see, were not fulfilled. Rudimentary moral principles, laws the inviolability of which he had been constrained to proclaim, seemed to him to be broken with impunity. He had been sent to teach that God would surely judge the wicked according to his wickedness, and recompense the righteous according to his righteousness; and yet the wicked prospered in their way, while the righteous were trodden under foot! Jeremiah looked these perplexing facts in the face until they fairly stared him down. He could not interpret them; no man could interpret them to him. The world was full of confusion and perplexity; the perplexities and confusions of the world were reproduced in his own heart. And so, with a daring honesty, he speaks out his thought before God—tells *Him* that his word has not come true, that his law is not fairly executed, that the world is all disordered and out of course. Jeremiah felt that, in calling

him to urge obedience to a law which was not enforced, and to speak words which were falsified by the event, God had deceived him, and that he was deceived indeed: and he frankly told God what he felt. Could any man in his place fail to think as Jeremiah thought, and feel as he felt? And was it not better that he should speak out his thought even with a brutal plainness than that he should come before the Lord with smooth flattering words, and pretend that he thought God just and good when the question which haunted him with its suggestions of despair was, "Will even Jehovah prove a liar?" True, he might have spoken more wisely, more reverently; but he could hardly have spoken more sincerely. And God forgives much to the sincere. A sincere man, in so sore a straight that, after having given up his neighbours and despairing of himself, he is even losing faith in God, is not very likely to select his words and make them musical in the ears of comfortable prosperous men. The impetuous rushing thought, craving instant expression, clothes itself in what words it can; and God, who sees the heart, is not a pedant that He should scan forms of utterance or overmuch concern Himself with what men say. A sound form of words, happy and choice expressions, are not without their value; but that which is beyond all price is "the honest and good heart," which speaks as best it may, using forms and observing rules if it can thus utter its thought, but breaking through all rules and despising even the most approved forms if only thus it can remain sincere.

2. But let us look a little more closely at the circumstances under and amid which Jeremiah spake. He was passing through a strange and most painful experience. God had bidden him lead forth "the ancients of the people and the ancients of the priests," *i.e.*, the old men into the valley of Ben-Hinnom. He was to break a potter's vessel

in their sight, and say, "Thus saith the Lord, Even so will I break this people and this city," the city and people of Jerusalem. It was a terrible task for a man of so tender and susceptible a spirit to pronounce this heavy doom on any people. It was a task still more terrible for a patriot to pronounce it on his own people. But Jeremiah was faithful to the unwelcome command. He led forth the elders; he broke the flask, or jar; he uttered the words which God had put into his mouth; he repeated the warning in the precinct of the Temple, in the hearing of "all the people." And what was the reward of his fidelity? The city was not broken; the heart of the Prophet was. Pashur,\* the priestly governor of the Temple, smote him and set him in the stocks before the Temple gate, that all who passed by might mock at him. Here he sat all night chewing the cud of bitter memories—smitten, humiliated, derided, because he had spoken words which it was a pain to utter. Is it any wonder that warring thoughts and impulses arose within him? that these outward changes of condition should induce a change in mind and heart? In the morning a prophet, the words of inspiration rushing from his lips, the priests and rulers awed for the moment by the authority with which he spoke; in the evening he is exposed to shame and derision, a butt for the scorn of fools: he, a priest, is smitten by a priest; he, a prophet of God, is smitten by the official representative of God: and that solemn warning which he had been compelled to deliver is turned into a byword and a jest, all the salutary impressions it had made being effaced from the minds of the people. Is it any marvel that, called to endure such "shocks of change," to breast such "blows of circumstance," the spirit of the Prophet should faint within him; that he should resolve, "I will not

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\* Jeremiah xx. 1, 2.

make mention of the Lord, nor speak any more in his name" ? The marvel rather is, that even then—fallen and humiliated, deject and wretched, of all men most miserable—he should feel that the hasty resolve could not be kept; that God's word would burn on like a fire in his bones, and make him weary with forbearing, so that he would not be able to stay.

Nor is this state of mind, peculiar as it is, by any means peculiar to Jeremiah. Neither his resolve, nor the instant retractation of his resolve, need surprise us; they will not surprise us if we consider our own experiences, and by these interpret the experience of the Prophet. The interior history of Jeremiah is simply an illustration of the discouragements encountered by all who speak and work for God, and of the secret of their continuance in that work despite their discouragements.

Let us mark what these discouragements are and were. There was *the want of success*, or the apparent want of it. It was nothing to Jeremiah that the people flocked to hear his word, if they would not receive and obey it. It was nothing that he could touch and impress them for the moment by dramatic action and passionate appeal, if, so soon as he ceased to speak, the impression wore off, effaced by contact with the influences of an evil world. It was not much even to have discharged his conscience, if he did not win his hearers to repentance. And they were not won. They were still bent on their old sins. They returned from Ben-Hinnom unchanged, unamended. Before they left the Temple in which he had repeated his warning, they put him to an open shame. Under the compulsions of an overmastering inspiration, he had done violence to the whole bent and strain of his timorous sensitive nature; instead of shrinking into seclusion and lamenting the sins of Israel, he had gone out among them to denounce their sins and to

wield the terrors of the Lord. And *this* was his reward! The word he had been compelled to speak was turned into a jest, and he, for speaking it, was smitten and disgraced. So far as he could see, he had laboured in vain, and spent his strength—he, who had so little strength to spend—for nought.

There was another discouragement. *He had to encounter the opposition of those from whom he expected*, and had the right to expect, *sympathy and help*. He expected, he had a right to expect, that the priests would uphold him, himself a priest, in his endeavours to publish and enforce the will of God. To him it was “a terrible thing” that *they* should reject the word he had to speak and set themselves against him. Of whom might he hope for succour and furtherance if not from them? If the priests failed him, there were the prophets, men raised up by God to rebuke the sins of the priests and to fill up the lacking measures of their service: would not *these* be companions in his labour and affliction? Himself a prophet, he might surely look for their goodwill and support while speaking by that Spirit who at times inspired them. Yet even these proved faithless. He had to complain, “My heart is broken because of the prophets: they walk in lies, and strengthen the hands of evil-doers.”\* If prophets and priests failed him, he had reason to hope for charity, if not for co-operation, from kinsfolk and friends. The bonds of natural affection and voluntary companionship might prove stronger than those of a common function and a common consecration. But in the extreme hour of his need even these failed him; nay, they conspired against him. His friends† were his defamers; “all his familiars waited for his halting” and hastened to “take their revenge upon him.” In the night of his failure, the timorous tender-

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\* Jeremiah xxiii. 9, 14.

† Jeremiah xx. 10.

hearted man was left to stand alone. Solitary, *forsaken*, he was made the butt on which friends and prophets and priests practised their wits, wounding him with the keen rankling shafts of their unnatural enmity.

And then, in his loneliness and desertion, there came back on the dejected Prophet the saddest and bitterest thought of all—the *thought* that his calling was not a true one, *that he had mistaken his vocation*, that he had misinterpreted the voice which spake within him; the thought, the conviction that he was not wise enough, nor good enough, nor strong enough for the prophetic function. Old memories of failure, bygone torments of self-distrust, revive; all his former misgivings gather into a thick menacing cloud, which seethes and billows around him, darkening the heaven of his hopes, shutting out all light of day. And so the temptation comes: “Give it up. You were never fit for the work. Why strive any more? Why weary yourself in vain? Are you so much wiser and better than these grave priests and loud confident prophets who thwart and rebuke you? Why should you any longer cross your nature to utter words which only anger them—the words of a God who cares neither to fulfil his word nor to vindicate his servant?” The temptation comes; and, for a moment, the Prophet yields to its wasting magic. He takes his resolve: “I will *not* make mention of Him, nor speak any more in his Name.” Again I ask, Who can wonder at it? Who will be the first to cast a stone of reproach at the humbled, self-distrusting, self-tormented Prophet? Not I, for one; nor, I think, any of you who have to speak for God. Our hearts are much more likely to ache with sheer sympathy as we consider this supreme instance of ministerial defeat, bewilderment, and shame, under trials which we ourselves have had to bear, and have not borne so well perchance as the priest of Anathoth.

3. But I am not careful to vindicate Jeremiah : God has long since done that : to his own Master he stands, even though to us he seem to fall. Let us rather learn from him what we may. *All* who work for God have entered or will enter into the painful experiences of this man of God,—all at least who attempt the kind of work which is most acceptable to Him. If indeed any of us are content with traditional dogmas and current moralities ; if we do not care to seek truth for ourselves and to follow it in scorn of consequence ; if our aim be to live on easy terms with the World and the Church rather than to discover and enforce the whole counsel of God,—there is nothing in the story of Jeremiah to trouble us. *We* are by no means likely so much as to come within wind of the scourge, and need have no fear of the stocks. But if we have devoted ourselves to God and his service ; if we aim above all things to bring our whole nature into harmony with his will, to try all men and all questions by the sincere and uncorrupted tests supplied by his Word, to form our own convictions and shape our own lives for ourselves and according to the light He has given us ; if we aim to apply the present truth to the popular sin, to deal with every man's conscience, and first of all with our own, as under the swift and searching eyes of Christ,—we must look to pay the usual penalty of fidelity and boldness. Sharing the endeavour of prophets and apostles, we shall also share the shame which was their glory, the reproach which was their plaudit, the suffering which was their joy. It is not easy for “such creatures as we are, in such a world as this,” to be true and good in any high or noble sense of the words. If we would possess ourselves of the very truth, we must buy the truth : buy it ? ah, yes, and pay ready money for it, and even then not get it for a time, or only for a time. If we would be sincerely good, we must take up the cross, and the cross is heavy and sharp ;

it will often seem to wound and bring us to a pause when it is but shedding sweet healing balms into our infected nature and strengthening us to encounter the difficulties of the way. In proportion to our real successes will be our apparent failures ; if our fidelity be great, the sharper will be its trials. Our very susceptibility to spiritual influences will bring doubts that will smite and fears that will fetter our souls. The more clearly we discern what we should be, the more profound will be our discontent with what we are. The more justly we appreciate the greatness of our work, the more bitterly shall we rue our unfitness for it.

Nor will all our troubles be the logical and inevitable results of the disparity between the lofty task to which we are devoted and the weakness and imperfection of the nature we bring to it. One of our keenest, as it is also one of our most frequent, pains arises from our want of success and the mystery which overhangs it. We know that the Father loves all men, and desires that they should come to the knowledge of the truth. We know that Christ died for all, that He might redeem them unto God. We know that the Spirit strives with all, that He may bring them to a better mind. And yet how few,—alas, how few are brought to a saving knowledge, or to anything like a complete knowledge, of the truth as it is in Jesus ! Is the fault with us, with us alone ? Without thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, without any sin against Christian modesty, we may surely be conscious that, in giving ourselves to the work of the ministry, we very cheerfully renounced many of the “chances” and gains and comforts which our brethren unblamably pursue and enjoy, from a sincere desire to do them good to the utmost of our ability. We may have the witness in ourselves that the truths we speak are very dear to us, and that we speak them with a sincere devotion ; that

we anxiously study how to convey them in forms most likely to arrest thought and to induce conviction: that our supreme aim and desire is to win men to a more perfect love and obedience of the truth. Yet we do not win them, or we win only a few of them. Many, perhaps most, who listen to us remain unimpressed, unconvinced. Of those who receive the truth many do not hold it very fast, or do not suffer it to touch more than a narrow superfice of their lives. As we look back on a ministry of ten, twenty, forty years, even the most successful of us can recall no results at all commensurate with the means at our command. We have drawn no large number of souls into the Christian Fellowship; and, with all our desire to do much for those who have been won, we have been able to do little more than maintain them on the lower levels of obedience and devotion. They are not *transfigured* by the truth. Now and then, perhaps, this or that face shines as it comes from the Sacred Presence of a Divine communion; but it is not for long, nor at the best is its radiance so dazzling that it need be veiled lest men should be unable to endure the lustre of its holiness. In some moods, in moods that are by no means infrequent with us, we are fairly overborne by the sense of failure, by the vanity and futility of the work it has cost us so much to do. Like the Prophet, we mourn and complain in our prayer that, although we have not spared our labour, we have laboured in vain; that, with but little strength to spend, we have spent our strength for nought.

And with us, as with him, this mood of spiritual dejection is often induced by the opposition of those from whom we expected, and had a right to expect, sympathy and help. We at least, whatever may be the case with other servants of the altar, have about us men who are every whit as much priests and prophets as we ourselves,—and who are quite

conscious of the fact; now and then, perhaps, a little too conscious for our peace. From these, or some of these, we often receive a sympathy the most delicate and cordial, a help far beyond our deserts, if not beyond our hopes. Yet I suppose at times we all meet men who, though bound by office and profession to uphold and further us, are of a narrow ungentle spirit, contracted in view, uncertain in temper, and who retard the very work which, in their sweeter moods, they are concerned to promote. If they do not smite us and clap us in the stocks, they are sometimes, perhaps, a little too ready to suspect our motives, to fetter our liberty of thought and action, to send us comfortless to a task which can hardly be achieved save in freedom and buoyancy of spirit: to assume that, without much study, they are familiar with questions which have been the main study of our lives: to resent almost as an insult the mere suspicion that we may have advanced to views of truth and duty which as yet are concealed from them. Not all who choose a teacher are willing to be taught. From what I have heard and read, I can well believe that many a faithful pastor has left his vestry, or even the house of some dear good-natured friend, with a heart as heavy and despondent as that of Jeremiah when he sat in the Temple stocks with the dark night rushing down upon him. *The stocks of the Temple* indeed are apt to be terrible instruments of torture to a refined and sensitive spirit, even when they are used more for want of thought than want of heart. Nay, however happy we may have been in our relation with our brethren,—and some of us have to thank God that we have been very happy,—although no neighbouring minister should have been ready to suspect our orthodoxy, no officer of the Church to restrain our freedom, no dear friend to whisper biting jests, we all know at least *one* priest and prophet who is very apt to betray us. A man might surely account him-

self his own best friend, and hope to have some comfort from himself. But we, unhappy that we are, soon discover that we are our own worst enemies ; that we are more unfaithful to ourselves, to our own best interests and highest aims, than any of our friends. Ah, how often and how bitterly have we to lament the infirmities of temper, the inconstant will, the lack of faith, and charity, and devotion, by which we hinder our own work and thwart our own endeavours ! How often, with what bitter tears of contrition, have we to cast ourselves at the feet of the Divine Compassion, and to confess to Him who is in the secret of our hearts that we are not worthy to make mention of Him, nor to speak any more in his Name !

And then to us, as to the Prophet, there comes the temptation : " Give it up, give it up. You were never fit for the work. You have mistaken your vocation. You would have been happier in it and more successful had God called you to it. You have found yourself out at last—that is all. And now go into a quiet place apart, and humbly begin a lower task." And for the moment—but, ah, how often that moment recurs !—in our misery and self-abasement, we yield to the temptation, not knowing it for what it is, mistaking for a Divine monition the impulse of a weary and impatient heart.

4. We need not, however, and we must not, limit the application of these thoughts to pastors and teachers. You, my brethren, who have no public ministerial function to discharge, are nevertheless " ministers of the Lord Jesus Christ." You have each a word to speak and a work to do for Him. At the lowest you have to appropriate his truth and to act upon it, so bearing your witness to his grace. And that is by no means an easy task : of all tasks it is the most arduous as it is the most blessed. It is a task which

will bring with it frequent accesses of despondency and fear. You will meet, or seem to meet, little success. The sins you have renounced will come back upon you when you look not for them, overtake you when you think them left far behind, and reduce you to the old bondage. Truths and virtues which you supposed you had at last made your own will evade your grasp as you are rejoicing over them, just as the Master vanished from his disciples the very moment their eyes were opened and they knew that it was the Lord. The more resolutely you "crucify the old man with its lusts," nay, the nearer it is to dissolution, the more vigorously and convulsively will it assert its vitality. The more absolutely you "put on the new man created after Christ Jesus," the less will you trust in your own wisdom or righteousness. Often enough, and too often for your peace, the work which is drawing toward its completion will seem as though it were barely begun, and you will feel that you also have spent an ebbing strength for nought.

And *you* will meet with opposition where you little looked to find it. Habits which you once thought friendly to godliness will prove hindrances of which at any cost you must be rid. Dogmas which you once held to be absolute expressions of absolute truth will become dubious to you, perhaps incredible. Rites and forms which you once deemed of all but saving efficacy will turn out to be of lesser value, possibly of none. You will often have to "pluck out a right eye," from which you expected no little guidance; and to "cut off a right hand," with which you meant to do no little work. Nor will all your oppositions be from within. Men will disappoint you as well as you yourselves. Brethren will fail you at your need, proving deficient in the very graces for which you gave them credit. Priests will shew no sanctity, prophets breathe no inspiration, teachers of the truth will prove to be of those who "walk in lies," ministers

of the altar "servants of unrighteousness." Even friends and familiars may "wait for your halting," and not be overmuch grieved should you stumble and fall. You will know at times what it is to sit lonely and forsaken, your heart swelling with a strange bitterness as the starless night of a broken and defeated hope darkens down upon you.

And then, in times like these, when the sense of failure is at its keenest, and friends leave you unsolaced in your misery, you will enter into the depths of the Prophet's experience. To you the temptation will come, "Your calling is not a true one. You have no vocation for the Christian life. Give it up; you were never fit for it. Why strive and weary yourself in vain for One who has not kept faith with you, nor given you the blessedness you sought?" The temptation will come, it will surely come: and the thought, the resolve, will flash into your heart, "I will not make mention of Him, nor call any more on his Name." Well for you, my brethren, if the resolve be withdrawn as soon as made. Well for you, if in your heart, as in Jeremiah's, the sacred fire burn on till, weary of forbearing, you can no longer stay.

5. For here, finally, is *the Secret of our Constancy* in Christian work, notwithstanding its manifold difficulties and discouragements. We do not possess the Word of God; it possesses us. The purifying refining fire, when once it has fallen from heaven, burns on and on till it has consumed all our dross. If it be hard to speak for God, it is harder still to forbear; for it is not we who speak, but the Word in us, the Word which is so much stronger than we. If it be hard to pursue the work, it is impossible to "stay" from it; only those can stay who never really began. Here lies our hope. We did not choose God, but God us; and He chose us, not because we were wise, or strong, or good, but that He

might make us good, and strong, and wise. *We* did not put his Word into our hearts; *He* put it there, and will keep it there till it has wrought us to his mind and made us meet for his service. *We* did not kindle the heavenly fire of love for truth and duty; God kindled it, nor will He suffer it to go out until it destroy our evil self, and the sacrifice be complete.

It was because Jeremiah knew this that he withdrew his resolve so soon as he had uttered it. With all his consciousness of defect, and though that consciousness sometimes obscured his better knowledge, he *knew* that the word he had to speak, the work he had to do, were given him of God. To him it had been revealed, "Before I formed thee, I knew thee; and before thou camest out of the womb, I sanctified and ordained thee a prophet." His vocation did not rest on his aptitude for foreseeing things to come, or for uttering eloquent discourses. If it had, he could have stayed from it when it seemed to lead to no good result, and, still more, when he came to doubt whether any such aptitude were in him. He was marked and sealed for his vocation before he knew good or evil. All his capacities and endowments were to fit him for his vocation, but they did not constitute it. They might perish; his inward satisfaction in the work might perish with them. It might bring nothing but pain to him or to his people. Others might hate him for it. He might be tempted to despise it himself. But still his vocation must be pursued, for it was given him of God. And the proof was, that through all, under all oppositions from without and all misgivings from within, the sacred fire burned on and *would* shed its light. He could not stay; to forbear was a weariness transcending all other ills. He *must* bear witness to the Word, if not by speaking it, then by patiently enduring whatever sorrows and shames his proclamation of it had brought upon him.

Is there not a solid and reasonable hope for us in that, my brethren, if we are his companions in the kingdom and patience of the Lord? If God has called us to speak for Him, our vocation does not depend on our success in it, nor even on our love for it or our satisfaction in it. If He has kindled the sacred fire in us, we cannot but let it burn on, even though it should burn up comfort, hope, life itself. We are where He has placed us, and we dare not desert our post because of wind and rough weather; we are doing the work He has assigned us, and we must go on doing it, even though it should not seem to prosper in our hands.

But how shall we know that He *has* called us to speak for Him? Do we, by assuming the vocation of the teacher, profess that we are of a more excellent spirit than the brethren who listen to us, or that we are more variously and highly endowed, or even that we are more usefully engaged? Are these the facts, or assumptions, on which we base our call? No, not these. We do not profess to be better than other Christian men; they are often of a more excellent spirit. Nor do we profess to have greater gifts, or a more useful occupation. But we do profess, or we have no claim to speak for God to men, that in his sovereign mercy He has given us to see certain truths so clearly, and made us so sensible of their infinite importance, that we cannot in anywise refrain from publishing and enforcing them so long as we have any faculty of utterance or any opportunity of using it. We do profess that to proclaim these truths, to persuade men to receive and obey them, is a task so great, so dignified, and carries in itself so dear a reward, that we esteem it above all other tasks, and are content, so that we may give ourselves to it, to forego the honourable toils, the comforts and pleasures, the gains and ambitions which might otherwise lawfully engage our thoughts. This is our call; and I am bold to say that it is the authentic call of Heaven. This

is the vocation which God has chosen for us, not we for ourselves, by revealing his truth to us with power and by moving us to proclaim it. Other vocations may be and are equally honourable, and may require higher and more various gifts—as, for example, that of the Christian statesman. But this is *our* vocation, the vocation to which we have been called of God; and therefore we cannot withdraw from it so long as we have strength for it and occasion serves. Through evil report and good report, through success and failure, in the temple or in the temple-stocks, whether men hear or forbear, *we* cannot forbear; the sacred impulse *will* have its will of us, and, if we cannot do what we would, we must still be doing all that we can. If we cannot rejoice in having won many souls to righteousness, we are or should be content to have discharged our conscience in the sight of God; if we cannot hope to shine as stars in the firmament for ever, we are or should be content to burn like candles, which *waste* while they burn, and yet shed a welcome light in the huts where poor men lie. It is the labour to which we are called, not to success in it; and, so long as we are honest diligent workmen, we need be neither despondent nor ashamed. True teachers, authentic priests,

Choose not their task—they choose to do it well.

One of our recent censors affirms that our “teaching, however good, too generally resembles the action of the sun on desert plains; it falls on unpropitious soil.” Be it so: nevertheless the sun does shine even on the desert; and God meant it to shine there; and probably, were we wise enough, we should discover that the sun, even when it shines upon sand, subserves some useful purpose. Shall we, then, refuse to let our light shine because it falls as on desert plains? Let us rather shine on with our utmost heat,—and the sun,

you know, is hottest in the desert,—content with the assurance that, if we are not turning the very sand into fertile soil, we are at least about our Father's business.

6. And you, my brethren, whom God has called to serve Him in other modes, if you are in Christ, you also, in a very true and comfortable sense, are the elect of God. Or ever you were brought forth, He had chosen you; He had sanctified and ordained you to be his servants. Despite your manifold infirmities, and though your consciousness of sin and defect at times obscures your better knowledge, you *know* that He has called you, "by patient continuance in well-doing, to seek for glory, honour, and immortality." Your Christian vocation is not based on your aptitude for it, but on his word—a word that can make you fit ministers of his grace and truth. And the proof is, that, amid all the dark-nesses of defeat, in every night of failure and self-despair, the sacred fire burns on, illuminating the inward temple even when your eyes, blinded with bitter tears, cannot find the light, revealing its presence in the weariness which lays hold upon you if you cease from the work. Here lies your hope. If you are sometimes tempted to "stay," you cannot stay; if you would be glad to "forbear," you cannot forbear. So long as any love of truth stirs within you; so long as, despite past failures and present misgivings, you are constrained to seek and obey the truth, you have the witness in yourselves that you are called of One who is more to you than priest or prophet, or familiar; One who will never leave any good work which He has begun until He has made it perfect.

It is in this large, hopeful, patient temper that, I trust, we meet to-day and shall return to our work; not thinking much of our fitness for this office or that, but thinking with an infinite regard of Him who has graciously drawn us into

his service and assigned to each his post; not unexpectant of frequent failure and discouragement, but resolved to endure whatever He may lay upon us, knowing in all and through all that He who has called us will perfect his strength in our weakness, and establish his work upon us, not because we are fit to do it, but because it is his work, and He has so greatly honoured us as to labour at it together with us.

“The obedient man speaketh victories;” and if we obey with meekness the pure word which God has engrafted in us, *we* shall speak victories some day, even though our victories, like the Master’s, tarry long and arise from apparent defeats. He had “long patience:” let us also be patient, and stablish our hearts in Him.

## VIII.

## The Elegy on Shallum.

JEREMIAH xxii. 10.

“Weep ye not for the dead,  
 Neither bemoan him :  
 But weep ye sore for him that goeth away ;  
 For he shall return no more,  
 Nor see his native country.”

THIS exquisite little elegy, which was sung for many years in the city of Jerusalem, has a music and a pathos which even the least instructed and least thoughtful reader can hardly fail to recognize. Quite apart from their meaning, the mere words have a charm. They sound like a song. The very tone and rhythm of them might well move a sensitive heart to pensive reflection. Musical in themselves, they readily ally themselves with music ; and, indeed, there is one of Mendelssohn's “Songs without Words,” to which they go as naturally as though he had had these words in his mind when he wrote the song.\*

And yet I can remember the time when I used to look at them with a kind of despair, feeling a beauty in them for which I could not account, conscious of a meaning in them, and a sadness, that I could not fathom. *Who* was “the dead” man for whom no lament was to be sung ? *Of whom* did the prophet speak as “him that goeth away ?” and

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\* “Lieder ohne Worte,” Book V., No. 3.

where did he go? and what was the tragic fate that overtook him? and what was there in him and in his fate that a whole nation should lament and bemoan him?

To some, perhaps, these questions may still be as perplexing as they once were to me. They, too, may feel the beauty of this most musical and pathetic elegy; but their enjoyment of it may be marred by their partial or entire ignorance of the historical facts which it so melodiously laments. Of these, then, let me give what account and explanation I can.

From the time of Solomon downward, the Hebrew State was divided into two great political parties, one of which stood faithful to Jehovah and looked to Him for succour, while the other fell away to the service of heathen gods, and sought to ally themselves now with Assyria and now with Egypt. On the whole, the pagan party prevailed. More than once, indeed, the downward course of the Hebrew Commonwealth was arrested; as, for example, by the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: but these feeble barriers were soon swept away by the swelling tide of idolatrous vices and corruptions. During the long reign of Manasseh, the grandfather of Josiah, the very Temple itself was desecrated with the statues, altars, and licentious rites of heathen gods; foreign alliances were courted, foreign exactions submitted to; and in the very streets of Jerusalem the leading statesmen of Judah might be seen clothed some in the Assyrian and some in the Egyptian garb, ostentatiously parading, by their "foreign apparel," their leanings to this alliance or to that.\*

But though the great bulk of the people were vicious and corrupt, and most of their statesmen still more corrupt, there remained a faithful "remnant" which listened to the voice

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\* Zephaniah i. 8.

of the prophets, held fast their allegiance to Jehovah, and struggled against the growing corruption of the nation at large. Hated and oppressed, driven to hide themselves in holes and corners during the long tyranny of Manasseh, they came forth, and held up their heads with joy, when the pious Josiah ascended the throne. Josiah proved himself a sincere patriot, zealous for the honour of "the God of the Hebrews." Led by him, the people cleansed the Temple of its pollutions, destroyed the high places on which sacrifices had been offered to idols, and the groves which had been profaned with their dissolute rites. Once more a pure offering was made in a pure Temple; foreign alliances were discarded; the national patriotism was evoked; the law of Moses was sternly enforced; and Jehovah returned and dwelt among his people. The provinces, torn from the kingdom of Judah by neighbouring foes, were reconquered; commerce flowed in wider channels than before; for a time the people tasted the sweets of security, abundance, peace: it almost seemed as though a new day of hope were dawning on the land.

But the evil was too deep-seated for cure. It could only be checked and delayed. From the first the prophets had foreseen that the reform would be but partial, the respite but brief. For more than thirty years, indeed, Josiah waxed stronger and stronger; but even during these years of reform many signs of adverse change were visible. The barbarians swept down from the Scythian wilds and overran the East. The mighty empire of Assyria was crippled and dismembered; its vassals and its enemies rose up against it. Above all, Egypt, which had suffered and lost much by the Assyrian supremacy, bestirred itself. Rejoicing for the time in a singularly able and energetic dynasty of kings, Egypt conquered and annexed many of the Assyrian territories; and, at last, advanced towards Nineveh itself.

On his way thither, Pharaoh-Necho, the Egyptian despot, seized some fortified cities in the north of Palestine. Josiah felt himself menaced and endangered. He marched boldly against the Egyptian forces, encountered them on the broad plain of Galilee, on which the fate of Palestine has so often been decided, and was mortally wounded in the field, from which he was carried half dead. He expired of his wounds; and, with him, the last hope of Israel seemed to be extinguished. As man, as king, as "the hope of Israel," Josiah lived long in the affections of his people, who never saw his like again. The day of his death was commemorated for many years; and on this day the singing-men and singing-women of Israel publicly chanted elegies composed in his honour by Jeremiah and other of the prophets.

In the Old Testament there are no less than three references, in three different books of Scripture, to this annual lamentation and to the elegies which were sung at it. In the Book of Chronicles,\* we are told that "Jeremiah lamented for Josiah; and all the singing-men and singing-women speak of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and have made them an ordinance in Israel." In the Book of Lamentations,† one of these elegies is recorded,—a very sweet and pathetic verse, "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we had said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen." And it is these elegies which Jeremiah, in the verse before us, now bids the people sing no more. They are no more to "weep for the dead" king; they are no longer "to

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\* 2 Chron. xxxv. 25.

† Lam. iv. 20. Whether this be the elegy of Josiah is, however, doubtful. Many hold it to be that of Zedekiah. In any case it is worth quoting as a specimen of the elegies which the ancient Hebrews sang year by year.

bemoan *him*," lovely as he was in life, and heroic in death. A new and deeper tragedy demands their tears.

That we may see what this more recent and moving tragedy was, we must complete our story of that troubled time. After his victory over Josiah in Galilee, then, the King of Egypt, instead of advancing against Jerusalem, turned northward, and conquered Damascus, Hamath, and other Syrian towns. The city of Jerusalem thus obtained a brief breathing-space; there was an interval in which her statesmen might decide on the course they would take. As I have said, there were two political parties in the city, the one heathen, the other Hebrew. Each was now headed by a son of Josiah. Eliakim, the elder son, was at the head of the heathen party; Shallum, a younger son, was at the head of the party which stood faithful to the laws and traditions of Israel. At first, while the memory of Josiah was still fresh, and his servants held the reins of power, they had no great difficulty in placing Shallum, although he was a younger son, on the throne of his father. Dissolute and oppressive, a doer of evil, Shallum was nevertheless lavish and ambitious, qualities which commonly win popular liking and applause. Moreover, unworthy as he was of the honour, he *was* the head and leader of the national, the patriotic, party, and was not himself, I think, without patriotism, though he is denounced as an evil-doer and oppressor. Raised to the throne by the national party, Shallum naturally set himself strongly against making terms with Egypt; "*his voice was all for war.*" By some unexplained stratagem, however, he was enticed into visiting the Egyptian camp in Syria. Here he was treacherously seized, thrown into chains, and sent a prisoner into Egypt. And so, after a reign of only three months, he disappears from history in the darkness of an Egyptian dungeon, in which, "bound in misery and iron," he sadly wore away his life.

In the Prophet's conception, this was a far worse fate than death, a fate worthy of a far more passionate lamentation. And, therefore, he bids the people cease their lamentations for Josiah, and sing an elegy for Shallum, his son. "Weep ye not *for the dead*, neither bemoan him: but weep ye sore *for him that goeth away*: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." And he assigns as a reason for his command, and a sufficient reason: "For thus saith the Lord *touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, who went forth out of this place; He shall not return hither any more: but he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more.*"

The brief reign of Shallum was the last gleam of hope that lit up the sky of Israel. When *he* was carried away captive, the heathen party regained its ascendancy in Jerusalem, and made their leader, Eliakim, king. Eliakim, a luxurious and godless prince, an utterly base and unworthy son of the good Josiah, willingly became the vassal and tributary of Egypt. And from that time onward, till the sacred land was swept clean from its sinful inhabitants, cloud darkened on cloud, until the final storm, the doom-storm, came; and the winds blew, and the floods arose, and the house of Israel, which seemed to be founded on a rock, fell with a crash that reverberates in our hearts to this day. Till the storm came, Shallum lingered in the affections and songs of the people. They loved him for his father's sake, and for the patriotic hopes he had quickened, and which he had time neither to fulfil nor to disappoint. They took the counsel of the prophet concerning him, and made elegies in his honour, and sang them year by year. Ezekiel (xix. 1—4) records one of them, which has a quaint and alien sound to our Western ears, but in which the Oriental races would still find much to delight them.

“O a very lioness is thy mother !  
She crouched among lions,  
Among young lions she nourished her whelps :  
And she brought up one of her whelps ;  
It became a young lion, and learned to tear the prey,  
It devoured men.  
But the nations heard of him :  
He was taken in their pit,  
And they brought him in chains into the land of Egypt.”

A young lion of royal strain, caught untimely, and chained and carried away captive—this was how the people of Israel conceived of Shallum ; this was the form in which they bewailed him in their annual elegies. And, even to us, few figures are more pathetic than that of the last real king of Israel languishing in an Egyptian dungeon, and perishing perchance on the very spot in which his great ancestor, Joseph, had slept and dreamed. If we read Jeremiah's words as though they were written on the dungeon wall of that poor discrowned king, or inscribed on his tomb, we can hardly fail to be touched and moved by their pathos :

“Weep ye not for the dead,  
Neither bemoan him :  
But weep ye sore for him that goeth away :  
For he shall return no more,  
Nor see his native country.”

What a tenderness there is in the words ! and what an ardent undying patriotism !

But is there nothing more ? Is there no “present truth,” no eternal truth, in these words ? no lesson, no consolation for us ? Surely there is, and it lies on the very surface of the words. Do not we weep for our dead ? We need, then, to hear the injunction, “Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan them.” Are not those whom we love sometimes carried away by divers lusts, and bound by them,—carried

away by them as into "a far country," where only too surely they "come to want?" And do we always lament their *sins* as much as we should lament their death, and more? If not, we, too, need to lay to heart the injunction, "Weep ye for *them*, rather than for the dead, for them who 'go away,' away from God, away from virtue, away from peace, into that land of darkness from which it is so hard to return."

We none of us believe that death is the greatest of evils. We know that it is not an evil at all, but a blessing, for the good; not a loss, but a "great gain." We know, we believe that, of all the evils that can befall a man, the very worst is that he himself should do and become evil, that he should forget God, that he should refuse to let God reign over him; that his life should be ruled by no Divine law, but be driven hither and thither of divers lusts, by uncontrolled passions which, lawlessly indulged, degrade and imbrute him. And yet who would infer our creed from our conduct? Who would infer that we dread sin more than death and lament it far more bitterly? When a close friend dies, how we weep and mourn, long refusing to be comforted; how we break from our accustomed round of thought and labour, to what trouble and expense we willingly put ourselves: what sacrifices would we not gladly make could we thereby avert the fatal stroke, or bring back the beloved dead to life!

You would almost laugh at me if I were to ask, Do you weep and lament with equal passion when a friend—a child or parent, a husband or wife—falls into sin? Does *that* come upon you with a shock which drives you from your usual round of thought and duty? Are you willing to go to any cost, to make any sacrifice, in order to recover your friend from the fatal effects of his guilt? Do you mourn for him as for one dead? And yet, must I not ask these questions of you, ask them seriously, urgently? Should there even

be any need or room to ask them? If sin is more terrible to you than death, how is it that you are not more terrified by it? how is it that you are not more zealous to avert it, to save men from it, to do your part towards stamping it out of the world?

Call men to a crusade against death, in which there was even the faintest hope of victory, and who would not join it? But call them to a crusade against sin, in which there is not only the hope, but the assurance, of ultimate victory, and of victory over death as well as over sin; and who offers himself for this war? Do you? do I? I think we may begin to have some hope of ourselves when we find that we really fear sin more than death, not for ourselves alone, but for others, and are more hurt to see them do a wrong action than to see them expire, and are even more prone to weep and lament over the guilty than over the dead.

Some of you, since men die daily, have no doubt recently wept for your dead, and bemoaned them, although you know that they have passed through death into life everlasting. Ah! weep no more—at least for them. They are happy now; why should their happiness bring you tears? If faith were perfect in us, if love were perfect, we should not weep for the dead who die in the Lord, for to *die* in the Lord is to *live* in the Lord. Sorrow for the pious dead is selfish sorrow, and shews that we are thinking more of ourselves than of them, more of our loss than of their gain, more of the winter of our loneliness and discontent than of the summer of their joy. If you would weep unselfish tears, the tears of love, weep not for those who have gone away from you to be with God; but weep ye sore for those who have gone away from God, though they are still with you. Weep for the sinful, for the lost, who wander through the “far country,” seeking rest, and finding none; seeking food, and finding none. Weep for the weak guilty souls who have sold themselves into the

captivity of evil, who have been conquered and bound by some lust of the flesh or of the mind, who loathe their bonds, but cannot break them ; who sigh for deliverance, but sadly forebode that they shall “return no more, nor see their native country ;” yea, weep for *these*. For, if you weep for them, you will soon give them more than tears. You will carry them the tidings of salvation. You will tell them of Him who came to “bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness from the house of bondage.” You yourselves will labour to help and redeem them, seeking by your kindness to persuade them of his kindness, by your mercy to convince them of his mercy. And in these works of love and compassion you will find a sovereign cordial for your personal sorrows and griefs. Weep for the sinful, and you will no longer idly bemoan the dead. Seek out the lost, and you will no longer bewail *your* loss. Let love inspire and rule you, and all the selfishness will pass out of your grief, and, with the selfishness, all the pain : you will enter into the sacred and abiding peace of God, who, *because* He loves all men, has appointed unto all men once to die.

Time is but as the veil in the Temple, which hides “the holy of holies” from us. For many of us the veil is already luminous, or half-luminous ; we can discern on it the shadows of those who walk within it, in the light of the glory of God. Why should we mourn for *them*, or for the friends who are called to join them ? Soon we, too, shall pass within the veil, and be transfigured by the Divine glory. Meantime, let us labour, as we wait, till our change comes, seeking to draw others into the outer court of the Temple in which for the present and till we reach “the holiest of all” we are content to worship ; and so lose all the pain of waiting, and of parting, in the duties and hopes and joys of a Divine service.

## IX.

## A Christmas Homily.

NEHEMIAH viii. 10.

NO text could well be more appropriate to the season. There is a sound of Christmas in the very words. Christmas Day is "holy to our Lord" as no other day is. However spare or plain our food on other days, on this day even the poorest of us sits down to something in the semblance of a feast. And though at other seasons we may be thoughtless and careless, or even hard and penurious, at this season, "so gracious and so hallowed is the time," we feel some touch of pity for the poor, and "send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared." For all these Christmas observances we have warrant and sanction, even for eating richer food and drinking a choicer wine than is commonly placed on our tables. The day of the Lord Jesus, like the day of the Lord Jehovah, may be *consecrated* by a feast. Our very feast may be, and should be, holy to the Lord—a most acceptable act of worship to Him. By his prophet God rebukes those who "weep on his altar." He would have us joyful in Him. Sorrow is the fruit of sin, and always carries with it some taint, some reminiscence, of the bitter root from which it springs. No doubt sorrow, penitence, is necessary to sinful "creatures such as we are, in such a world as this;" and therefore even our tears may be a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. But the sacrifice most

acceptable to the happy God is "the sacrifice of thanksgiving." Even when David had lost the son for whom he had mourned many days, when he would come before the Lord, he bathed, put on clean festive garments, and anointed his head. Even when the Jews weep as they listen to the words of the Law, and contrast its larger promises of good with their misery and poverty, the Governor bids them leave their weeping and "make great mirth," and an inspired psalmist urges them to go into God's gates "with thanksgiving, into his courts with praise." And a Christian Apostle, broken with many pains and cares, exhorts those who had suffered the loss of all things, to "rejoice alway, and evermore rejoice." *We*, therefore, cannot plead our poverty, our losses, our sorrows, as an excuse for our lack of brightness and hope, for we may be "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;" nor do our sufferings exceed those of the primitive disciples, or our losses those of the Jews who wept in the Water Gate, nor are our bereavements heavier than that of David. If we will, *we* may hear a voice, and a Divine voice, at this sacred season, which bids us: "Go, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared: for this is the day of the Lord, and his joy is your strength."

But it may be objected, at the very outset: "Surely Englishmen need no urging to eat and drink the best they can get. They are only too ready to spend "a merry Christmas," and to eat and drink more than is good for them."

Possibly: and yet none the less—nay, all the more—they may need to listen to a *Divine* command to eat the fat and drink the sweet. For, first of all, if we English folk do, as I am afraid many of us do, eat and drink at Christmas

time to an excessive degree, we take our pleasure somewhat sadly and shamefacedly. Even as we gather round a well-spread board, we often have an uneasy impression that it is hardly right of us to enjoy rich savours and the mellow generous juice of the grape. We ask a blessing on our feast indeed, but we hardly expect God to bless it to us; we do not regard our feast as itself an act of religious worship.

Now, whatever we suspect to be wrong, becomes wrong to us. It may be quite right in itself, but if we do not feel it to be right, it injures and debases us. We condemn ourselves in that which we allow ourselves to do; and if our own heart condemn us, God will condemn us. We need, therefore, to be reminded that "every creature of God is good, if it be received with thanksgiving." We need to be reminded that God enjoys our joy, even our joy of feasting, that a keen appreciation of his gifts is one of the most acceptable returns we can make for his bounty. If, at this time of gifts, you give a book or a toy to a child, which do you like best, its formal "Thank you," or its frank and eager enjoyment of your gift? And if God should send you a little game or poultry, or some good wine for your Christmas feast, which do you suppose He will like best,—that you should say a formal "Thank you" to Him, and partake of his bounty with a secret misgiving that He will be angry with you if you enjoy it very much, or that you should freely enjoy what He freely gives, and thank Him not in words only but also in your deeds?

Settle and root this conviction in your hearts, then, that it is *God* who bids you eat the fat and drink the sweet on this day of the Lord, and that you cannot praise Him more acceptably than by a frank enjoyment of his gifts. For if you take your Christmas fare as his gift and enjoy it by his command, you will lose that uneasy impression of a sin in pleasure which makes pleasure sinful to you. Nay, more,

your fare will become all the sweeter to you because you take it as the gift of God, and because of the cheerful moderation with which you partake it. For if you accept "the fat" and "the sweet" as his gifts, you will sit at your tables as guests with God, knowing that all your innocent mirth and frank enjoyment are very pleasant to Him, but not daring, in his presence, to abuse his gifts to your hurt. We have all at times, I suppose, dined on Christmas Day with men to whom the thought of God and his goodness was the most pleasant of thoughts, from whom it was hardly ever absent, to whom it was never a restraint. And as they have sat, with their children round them, glancing from one happy face to another, their eyes have swelled with the tears of a joyful gratitude; and in the pauses of their mirth, a mirth incalculably deeper and purer for such emotions, they have breathed a silent thanksgiving to the Giver of all good. These are they who truly enjoy their Christmas Day, with its pleasant gatherings and generous fare. These are they who, even as they eat the fat and drink the sweet, as they talk and laugh and make great mirth, are preparing themselves to sit down with the Lord, at his table, in his kingdom.

It cannot be denied, however, that there are others who abuse the time. With them a good dinner means a surfeit, and to "get merry" is to get tipsy. Nor am I careful to deny that on "this day of our Lord" we are all apt to forget that it is his day, to set ourselves too exclusively to the indulgence of the senses, to suffer our mirth to degrade into that laughter which is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. Unless we are on our guard against it, we may all, only too easily, be tempted by the customs of the time to mar and spoil the true enjoyment of the day by excess—excess in foolish talk or silly mirth being, remember, no less injurious than excess in eating and drinking. Our great

safeguard against all excess is that devout gratitude to which I have already adverted—the sense that God is with us, that it is his bounty which furnishes our table, that our pleasure must be true pleasure, *i.e.*, simple, innocent, bright, if it is to be acceptable to Him.

Another and a prime safeguard is the *charity* enjoined in the text. Before we sit down to eat the fat and drink the sweet, we should “send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared.” Much of our excess springs from what in itself is not a bad motive,—that hunger for large enjoyment which springs up in hearts that are weary, and often sad. Our lives are so toilsome, so monotonous, so pinched with care, so oppressed with grief and disappointment that, when, at long intervals, we get a few hours in which we may bid our souls rest from their labours, and eat and drink and be merry, it is very natural and very right that we should determine to enjoy them to the full; it is also very natural, though very wrong, that we should carry our eating and drinking and merriment beyond the limits within which they really cheer and animate us. We are so hungry for enjoyment that we pursue it with the eagerness which defeats itself; our violent delights have violent ends; out of our very pleasures we weave a scourge for our own backs. Is there, then, no better way of satisfying our hunger for good things, our craving to enjoy them?

Surely there is. If we eat and drink beyond the bounds of temperance, we fall into satiety, sickness, self-disgust. But I will tell you how you may eat and drink all day long, and yet be none the worse for it—nay, be all the better for it and the happier. Send portions of your good things to those for whom nothing is prepared. Taste your good food in your neighbour's throat; sip your good wine on his palate. Give a Christmas dinner, and as many dinners as

you can, to the poor, the hungry, the famished. The thought of the pleasure you have given them will sweeten your fare, and relieve your board of the superfluity which might otherwise breed excess.

Many of you, no doubt, either in the way of business or the way of friendship, send game, or oysters, or cheese to men who are as well off as yourselves, and who are likely to make you some sort of return. And you may get a little pleasure out of *that*, but not much, I think—not the deepest pleasure. If you would have *this*, you must give, hoping for nothing again. The “lord” in the Gospels who made a feast, to which he called the halt, the maimed, and the blind,—all the poor souls who had been worsted in the conflict of life and trampled under foot,—was the true epicure no less than the true Christian. Ah, how sweet his venison and game must have tasted to him as the hungry ate it! how rich the flavour of his wine as the thirsty drank deep draughts of it, and some little colour came back to their thin wan faces! And in this way we may all eat and drink and be merry for seven, or for seven times seven. Our enjoyment will be intensified and multiplied by as many as partake it. It will be all the more sweet and grateful to us the more they need it, and the less they can give us in return.

And if they give us nothing again, God will give us much; among other things, this—sobriety and temperance in our own mirth. It is not the kind and generous man, who has been scheming to give a feast to as many of his poor neighbours as he can, and whose heart hums a hymn of praise because God has enabled him to give them a little pleasure, it is not *he* who is in danger of excess. He has satisfied the hunger of his heart. He has a pure inward joy which would make him happy even though bread and water were his fare. It is the selfish greedy man, the man who

thinks only of himself, that exceeds—the man whose aim is to provide as sumptuously as he can for his own table, and who invites to it only those before whom he may parade his wealth, or those who will give him as good as they get, or those who will flatter his vanity and share his riot, and who takes no thought for the hungry, the poor, the miserable.

*Charity*, the charity which sends portions to those for whom nothing is prepared, is a prime safeguard to festivity and mirth. But the greatest is *piety*. Our joy must be “*the joy of the Lord*,” if it is to be our “strength.” And that we may better understand what this joy of the Lord is, let me do what perhaps I should have done before, viz., tell you the story of the text.

Some forty thousand of the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity. They had built their little Temple amid the ruins of Jerusalem, and resumed the worship of the Lord's house. But they were few, oppressed, and in great misery. They groaned under the tyranny of the Persian Satraps. The neighbouring Samaritans plundered their barns and fields. Their city was as yet undefended by fortified gates, and fell an easy prey to the troops of banditti who scoured the desolate country. “The city was large and great, but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded.” They complained in their prayer that they were slaves in the land given to their fathers. They said, “The land yieldeth much increase to the lords whom thou hast set over us because of our sins; also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.” In their distress they turned to Jehovah. They hungered to hear the Divine law, which many of them had never heard, copies being so scarce with them and life so hard. They met in the street before the Water-Gate; and Ezra, the scribe, brought out

the law and read it to them, and gave them the sense, and caused them to understand the meaning. As they listened, they wept. The contrast between what they had been, and what they were, was too much for them: once a great nation prospering under the Divine care, they were now a few poor slaves dwelling in a desolate undefended city, tilling a few ravaged fields, withering away, as it seemed, under the Divine curse. They fairly broke down. There was a rain of tears. Their very hearts melted within them. Nehemiah, the brave governor, saw that this was no fit mood for men who had so much to do and to bear. Grief would only unman them. And so he bids the Scribe shut his book, and says to the people, "Go your ways, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions to the destitute; mourn not nor weep, neither be ye sorry; the day is holy to the Lord, *and the joy of the Lord is your strength.*" What he meant was, I suppose, that, if man was against them, God was with them and for them; and that if they were glad and rejoiced in his presence and grace, *that* would be a much better preparation for the hard work they had to do than to stand weeping out vain regrets over a past that *was* past and could not be recalled.

The good counsel of Nehemiah was reinforced by a song from one of their poets or psalmists. It is the brightest and merriest in the Psalter, a true Christmas psalm.

"O be joyful in Jehovah, all ye lands !  
Serve the Lord with gladness,  
And come before his presence with a song !  
Be ye sure that Jehovah He is God ;  
It is He that made us, and not we ourselves :  
We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.  
O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving,  
And into his courts with praise !  
Be ye thankful unto Him and speak good of His name ;  
For the Lord is gracious ; his mercy is everlasting,  
And his truth endureth from generation to generation."

The people did as they were told. They “went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth.”

Now we all know by practical experience that joy is a strength. We know that, while sorrow depresses and unnerves us, joy gives us new heart and vigour. In a cheerful confident mood we can do that which is quite impossible to us when our strength is wasted in doubt and vain regrets. If we go to any task in a gay hopeful spirit, we are likely to do it well; while a dejected and fearful heart is only too likely to ensure the failure it anticipates and dreads. But if all joy is strengthening, how much more the joy of the Lord! For the joy of the Lord is that serene cheerfulness which springs from an unwavering trust in Him, which is therefore independent of the changes and losses and griefs of time. If God be our chief good, our supreme joy, as *He* does not change, our joy cannot change. Settled in a perfect trust in Him, we abide in a settled gladness and peace. All tasks are easier to us because we are sure of Him; all losses endurable because we cannot lose Him; all sorrows may be borne because we are joyful in Him. It is only because God's presence and help, his friendliness and love, his perfect care of us and his joy in our joy, are not real and supreme facts to us, because they are hidden from us by our sins and fears, that we are so often weak and miserable and perturbed.

And this pious trust in God, this devout delight in Him, which is the very life of our life, is also a prime safeguard to our mirth. What is the danger of our feasts and merry-makings? It is that we should think too much, too exclusively, of eating, and drinking, and mirth, and mere sensual enjoyment. It is our undue addiction to these which leads to sinful excess. What will be our best defence? Surely it will be to have a joy deeper, purer, more constant and ani-

mating than the joy of mere appetite and laughter. If we delight ourselves in God the Giver, his gifts will be all the more welcome and pleasant to us; but He Himself will be infinitely more and better to us than his gifts. To please Him, to praise Him, by doing his will, will be our supreme happiness. Learn a lesson from your own children. Which do they value most—your gifts, or you? If you put them on their love, will they not leave what they like most, and nestle in your arms and be content? And is it quite impossible that you should have for your Father the feeling they have for you?

I was once at a Christmas dinner at which, as the host and father stood up to say grace, he was struck rigid with pain. We had to carry him from the room to his bed. There was no danger; the only fear was that he would be confined to his chamber for a few days. But none the less the holiday was turned into a day of mourning; the feast broke down into something very like a fast. All the delicacies of the table lost their savour, and we, who had meant to be so merry, were quiet and grave and sad. How could it be otherwise? But is there no lesson for us in even that simple fact? Does it not shew how much stronger love is than appetite; that it is *the father* who makes the feast, not the rich fare or the sweet wines? And cannot you love God as your children love you? If you can, your whole life may be a feast; for who, or what, shall take from you the joy of the Lord? You have only to delight yourself in Him, and you are proof against all temptation; for how should you, loving Him supremely, care to indulge any craving so as to grieve his heart? You care so much more for Him than for anything else, that the temptations which master other men, lose their power for you.

How, then, shall we acquire and cultivate this joy of the

Lord? The psalmist of Nehemiah indicates two modes—worship and trust.

If we would be joyful before the Lord and serve Him with a constant gladness, we are to “come into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise.” *Worship* must be part of our feast if, as we eat the fat and drink the sweet, we are to be strong with the joy of the Lord. And surely it is but meet and right that on Christmas Day, “the day of our Lord,” we should all of us, in private if not in public also, in the home if not also in the church, give thanks and sing praises to Him who, as on this day, laid aside his eternal state, and became an infant of days such as ours. And yet *do* we, *all* of us, take as much pains to arrange for worshipping Him as we do to provide a good dinner? Do we enjoy the worship as much as the dinner, and account it even the best part of our Christmas feast?

Finally, if we are to be joyful before the Lord and to serve Him with a pure and constant gladness, we must add to our worship *trust*. Nehemiah’s psalmist warns us that we can only be thankful to God and speak good of his Name, as we are sure that He is a gracious God, whose mercy and truth are everlasting, and that we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. It is our distrust of Him and of our security in Him which so often gives us mourning for joy, and heaviness of spirit for the garment of praise. If we say that we believe, we do not *feel*, that He cares for us as the good shepherd cares for his sheep, that He will not let us want anything which will be really good for us so long as He can get it for us, that He loves us better than his life, and does not cease to love us because we are foolish and stray from his fold. O to believe from the heart in the unchanging, the everlasting, goodness and mercy of God! O to believe that He loves us, and gave Himself for us, and gives Himself to us! If only we could believe *that*, believe it

with a constant steadfast heart, what joy were comparable to our joy! What room were there for misgiving, for fear, for sorrow? "Love so amazing, so divine," would lift us clear out of our despondencies, our infirmities, our miseries. We should no longer swing and oscillate between joy and grief, but be fixed in an unalterable blessedness and peace. And why should we not believe it? Of what does this hallowed season, this day of our Lord, speak to us, if not of a love without limit, a love that could stoop from the royalties and splendours of heaven to the meanest lot and place on earth, a love stronger than death,—nay, stronger than the disgusts of infinite Purity at being brought face to face with evil and being "made sin"? How dare we, at Christmas time of all times, doubt or distrust the perfect illimitable love of God?

Go, then, my brethren, eat the fat and drink the sweet, but send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared; and let the joy of the Lord be your strength. Be ye joyful before Him, serve Him with gladness, come before his presence with a song. For He *is* your God, gracious and most merciful, and you are the people and the sheep of Him whose mercy is everlasting, and whose truth endureth from generation to generation.

## X.

## The Reed and the Wind.

ST. MATTHEW xi. 7.

THE whole passage, in so far at least as we are now concerned with it, reads thus:—"What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and very much more than a prophet."

## I.

If we read these Questions with care, we shall have many questions to ask about them. And, perhaps, the very first question, or series of questions, we ask will be: Why did the Lord Jesus select these figures rather than others? Why select, as probable objects of attraction to the multitude, a reed trembling in the wind, a courtier clothed in soft raiment, a prophet uttering words of doom? Why, instead of the reed, did He not select the cedar, which stretches its mighty arms to every breeze, and offers a broad and welcome shadow from the heat? Why, instead of the man in soft clothing, did He not select a man robed in the splendours of genius and imagination or consumed by the zeal of a fervent devotion? Was not the Baptist strong and immovable as a cedar against the breath of flattery and the blasts of opposi-

tion? Did not his influence grow and spread till it covered all the land? Were not his words bright with the light of natural genius and ardent with the flame of a most perfect devotion? Why, then, is he compared to a reed shaken with the wind? Why contrasted with a courtier shining in gorgeous apparel?

There are many answers to this question, or series of questions; and, though we should take them all and blend them into one, even then we should not exhaust the full meaning of our Lord's words. But let us take as many as we can.

Here is one. Our Lord's three Questions recall the very *scene*, the peculiar *form*, and the animating *spirit* of the Baptist's ministry. John was in the wilderness, in the unenclosed forest land of Judea,—in the wilderness, with its rocks, trees, underwood, heather; the swift river running through it, now tumbling down narrow gorges, now eddying in deep pools, now rippling over hot sands; the oleanders on its banks lifting their rose-red blossoms to the sun and flinging their sweet perfume on the air, the osiers bending and rustling in every wind. The first question, therefore, “Went ye out to see *a reed shaken with the wind?*” would recall to the listening crowd, Jordan, with its reedy wind-swept banks—the strong rapid stream by which they had listened to the Prophet's call, and in which they had been plunged for the remission of their sins.

John came clothed in a garment woven of rough camel's hair, with a leathern girdle round his loins, eating locusts and wild honey; a man austere in habit, recluse, abstinent, as utterly unlike as man could be to the gay courtiers of King Herod, who ruffled in gorgeous apparel and fared sumptuously every day. And, therefore, our Lord's second question, “Went ye out to see *a man clothed in soft raiment,*

such as may be found in kings' houses?" would recall the asceticism of the Baptist, the rude simplicity of his garb, the rustic fare with which he was content.

John came forth from his seclusion with an unearthly light gleaming in his eyes, with a severe yet passionate directness of speech, which set men musing in their hearts whether Elijah had not broken from his ancient grave, and convinced them that "the voice crying in the wilderness" was in very deed the voice of God. And, therefore, our Lord's third question, "Went ye out to see a prophet?" would recall, and was probably intended to recall, the fervour and inspiration with which he spoke whom "all men confessed to be a prophet" indeed, and the profound impression he had made on their light fluctuating hearts.

Taken thus, the three Questions call up before us the very *scene*, the peculiar *form*, and the animating *spirit* of the Baptist's ministry: we see the Prophet, in his hermit frock, standing by the reeds of Jordan, crying, "Repent ye, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

This is one way in which we may so read these Questions as both to recover their ancient meaning, and to feel them with new force. And here is another. We may take them as setting forth the Baptist's relation to *man*, to *self*, to *God*. John was no reed to be shaken by the breath of popular applause, or the blasts of priestly and royal opposition. He did not court the people, nor flatter the Pharisees, nor fear the king. With unswerving fidelity he rebuked the special sins to which those who heard him were prone—the Pharisee's as well as the publican's, the sins of the royal captain no less than those of the private soldier. He delivered his rebukes with a fearlessness, a freedom from all selfish aims, which made him seem rather a disembodied impersonal "voice" than a living man with human motives and emotions—"a

*voice* crying in the wilderness," and warning men of every rank and condition to flee from their lusts lest judgment should overtake them.

Severe to others, he was also severe to himself. He who might have dwelt in king's houses—for Herod loved him much and heard him gladly—made the desert his home. He who might have clothed himself in soft raiment, girt his robe of rough camel's hair with a leathern belt. He who might have "lived delicately," made locusts and wild honey his only fare. A preacher of temperance, he carried his own temperance to asceticism. A preacher of righteousness, he himself "punished his body and kept it under." A preacher of content, he himself was "content with such things as he had," though of those to whom he spake there was none so poor as to envy his lot.

Severe in the demands he made on men, still more severe in his demands on himself, he devoted himself wholly to the will and service of God, pouring the divine message into the most unwilling ears, breasting the enmity of a world in arms that he might apply the truth of God to the sins and needs of men. No reed shaken by the winds of human favour or opposition, no "lover of self" set on outward splendours and outward successes, in his relation to God he proved himself a true prophet, yea, and very much more than a prophet—"a man of God who was" *not* "disobedient to the word of the Lord."

This is a second way in which we may read the Questions, and find new meaning in them. And here is a third. We may take them as addressed to the thoughts and intents, the wishes and hopes, of the crowd who listened to them. Taken thus, we may understand our Lord to mean: What did you go out to see? What did you want and expect to find? Was it not a reed shaken by

the wind? Did you not expect, did you not covertly hope, that John would be influenced by the influence he won? that, as he became popular, he would bend before the popular currents of thought and aim? that, as he was courted and deferred to by the vulgar and by the great, he would abate the early rigour of his speech and become as other men? And yet, *could* this have been your expectation and hope? Had you wanted a courtier who would speak smooth things to you, who would gloss over your sins and flatter your virtues, who would be silent till you gave him leave to speak, and, his lips once opened, would frame them to meet your wishes or to avoid your displeasure: if that had been the type of man you wanted, would you have gone into the wilderness to find him? to this austere eremite of the woods, with only a single rude garment to his back, and a palate to which wild honey was a feast? Would you not rather have gone to the palace for him, where are men by the score who, so that they may live delicately and strut in brave attire, are content to be a "pipe for Fortune's fingers, to play what stop she please," to pander whether to popular or royal lusts, to outface truth with a lie, to defy God Himself if only they may please men? But whatever drew you into the wilderness, whatever you thought or hoped, whatever you went out to see, did not you *find* a prophet? no pipe for Fortune's fingers, but a man of clear and awful sincerity, a man rapt and absorbed in his devotion to eternal realities, a man whom no breath could bend, no ambition lure, from the task to which he was called? As you listened to him, did you not feel that life grew large and solemn; that he held up a glass in which you saw yourselves as you were, and as you might be; that he told you of sins which you knew you had committed, warned you of a judgment you knew you had provoked, invited you into a heavenly kingdom which you felt you could only enter through the gate of repentance

and amendment? Whatever you sought, was not *this* what you found?

In these three ways, then, each of which is in perfect harmony with the other two, we may read our Questions. We may take them as recalling the picturesque scene, the ascetic form, the prophetic spirit of John's ministry. We may also take them as defining his relation to man, to self, to God. And we may still further take them as interpreting the moods, the thoughts and hopes, with which the Jewish people regarded him. But even if we combine these three interpretations, we are still very far from having exhausted the meaning of our Questions. They admit, they crave and demand, a larger interpretation than any of these, an interpretation which applies them to us and to all men as well as to the Jews, which draws from them a spiritual and universal as well as an historic sense. And nothing can be easier than to interpret them thus. *We* are of one blood with the Jews who listened to John, and, then, to Jesus as He spake of John. What was attractive to them is likely to attract us; what they ran after will probably draw us. To this day, at least *the crowd* will go out to see a reed shaken by the wind, or a man clothed in soft raiment, or one whom they hold to be a prophet; and they will brave at least some of the perils and discomforts of the wilderness that they may behold so great a sight. Superhuman wisdom or force, the pomp and splendour of magnificence, inspired weakness: are not these still attractions, and great attractions for us? If we reflect, we shall see that the questions our Lord asked of the Jews hit the blots, not of Jewish nature alone, but of the common human nature as it reveals itself in us and in all the world.

Let any man discover, or profess to discover, the secrets of the invisible world, or to unveil the hidden mysteries of

future time, will not the crowd run to hear him speak, and be very apt to take him for a prophet? Even though it should be whispered that his power comes from below rather than from above—as some men said of John, “he hath a devil;” will that hinder the crowd? will it not rather prove a new attraction? Remember how, even in this shining age, the ignorant in town and country put their trust in gipsies, witches, fortune-tellers, and trust them all the more because their “wisdom” is thought to come from a dark and evil source. What chance would a “witch” with a pure kind angel to help her have, as against a witch with a familiar devil at her back? Remember, too, how, not the ignorant and sensual alone, but men so refined by culture that they have rejected the Bible as an outworn creed, have eagerly accredited the spiritualistic influence that turns a table into a teetotum or draws a wail from the most melancholy of musical instruments. Has the Church been any wiser? Has not she gone out, into a most barren wilderness, to gaze on prophets who are no prophets? Let any rash intruder thrust himself into the council-chamber of the Almighty, where even the angels cover their faces with their wings, and affect a knowledge of the eternal decrees; or let any ecclesiastical gipsy bid the world cross his palm with silver and he will tell it its fortune:—and alas, the Church will run after him, running none the less eagerly because the men they follow be utterly incompetent teachers of the truths of life and duty. Yes, a prophet in this bad sense, a prophet who is a foreteller rather than a teacher, a diviner rather than a divine, is still an attraction, and a very great attraction.

Nor have we even yet lost that ancient admiration of a man in soft clothing, of those who sit in gorgeous apparel at sumptuous boards. Outward pomp, splendour, magnificence have not lost their old charm. Most of us, I fear,

are a little proud if we know a *very* wealthy man, and mention his name oftener on the whole, perhaps, than we do that of any poor good man we know, and are oftener in his house. Pomp and splendour attractive ! Why, let any procession pass through our streets, appealing to us with bright colours, rhythmic motion, martial music ; and whether it be a king and court on their way to a coronation in a cathedral, or clown and tumbler, equestrian and dancer, advertising a circus, or even those very " odd fellows," who can't be provident and temperate without bragging about it in the public highways,—whatever it may be, do we not all run to our windows, or pour into the streets, and gaze and gape till we can see no more ?

And if the prophet, and the man in soft clothing, attract us, has not the reed shaken by the wind its own potent charm ? See the reed, how weak it is in itself, how weak and pliable ! It bends to every breath ; and, when the wind rises, it lashes to and fro, possessed and tormented by superior power, inspired by a might how far beyond its own ! There are many such reeds, shaken by many winds, in the human world, on which men love to gaze and wonder ; weaklings who put on the look of strength, simple and untrained persons who do that which we expect only from long culture and experience, infants and children precociously clever or accomplished. Does not a dwarf draw a crowd and wearily earn his bread by doing that which is not commonly done by a creature so small ? Does not an " infant phenomenon " draw a crowd to see the poor child do badly what it is wonderful that it can do at all ? Or, to take nobler instances, which is the more attractive to the throng that haunts the purlieus of literature, the artist who, in virtue of large natural endowment and consummate culture, is lord of his thought, and expresses it calmly, with the composure and finished perfection of a master ; or the man who writhes

and contorts, who foams out big swelling words, who is, or affects to be, mastered by a superior force, by an inspiration greater than he can command? Or, to come to the Church itself,—how was it in the primitive times? Did not the very disciples prefer tongues and miracles to exposition and service, gifts to goodness, eloquence to charity? And when, in modern times, those poor imitations of by-gone miracles appeared in England and Scotland; when strong men were struck to the earth, and the unlettered spake in strange tongues, and the cold and sceptical were rapt in fervent ecstasies of devotion, and the simple maiden uttered a wisdom beyond the reach of experienced age, and the sick sprang from beds they had never hoped to leave: how many went out to see these reeds shaken by the wind, and thought far more of these “gifts” and “wonders” than they did of a wise utterance of truth, or the gentle answer that turns away wrath, or the love that embraces its enemies, or the beauty of a kind and self-denying action? Nay, to take perhaps the highest illustration of all, does not Paul, torn and rent by many energies and many passions, struggling with thoughts too large for utterance, seem far greater to most of us than John, with his quiet yet deep simplicity, and a love so profound and constant that it hardly attempts direct expression? Are not marvels and wonders, then, still very impressive to us, even though we flatter ourselves that we have got over the vulgar craving for a sign? Do we not value great natural endowments more than obedience, meekness, and fidelity; spiritual gifts more than spiritual graces; knowledge and prophecies and tongues more than faith, hope, and charity; the reed torn and convulsed by the wind more than the calm gracious power of one who is strong enough to rule his gifts, and control his impulses, and guide his inspiration to serviceable ends?

In short, the more we reflect on them, the more clearly we

see that our Lord's Questions hit real blots in our nature, that He speaks of attractions which are still of a force to allure and beguile us. But here, perhaps, some one will say: "Admitting that these spectacles are attractive to us, what harm is there in yielding to their attractions? If we do run to see a prophet, or a man in soft clothing, or a reed shaken by the wind, what are we the worse for that?"

I reply, Very possibly, you are none the worse; very possibly, you may be much the better, if only you are on your guard against one mistake. Human weakness "possessed" by supernatural strength, external splendour and magnificence, insight into the spiritual world combined with prevision of future events,—these are things which always have been, and always will be, attractive to man; we may have a reasonable, and even a scientific, interest in them; to see and study them, their organs and manifestations, is at times good for us all. The mistake against which we must guard is this—taking our interest in these things to be necessarily a religious interest, and the spirit in which we contemplate them a religious spirit. Marvels, splendours, predictions are not of the essence of religion; we may have all these, and value them, and yet have no genuine piety. A Church may present us with a profusion of miracles; a Church may attract us by an orderly and impressive magnificence of outward forms, by gorgeous apparel, bright rhythmic procession, sweet perfumes, noble music; a Church may contain a whole "school" of prophets, it may interpret the divine decrees, map out future ages, empty "vials," open "seals," sound "trumpets" other than its own, and yet not be a true Church: instead of nurturing us in the faith, hope, charity which fulfil all prophecies, and will outlive miracles and all the splendours of time, it may only foster in us the conceit, the curiosity, the sensuousness from which it is the very office of religion to deliver us.

And, in like manner, a man may see visions, converse with spirits, dwell amid supernal glories ; he may convey all these spiritual wonders to a listening audience with the utmost magnificence of form and diction ; and he may be so occupied with these mere wonders, and outsides of truth and faith, as that he “falls away from grace,” and falls short of a pure, kind, and serviceable life.

It is against this very danger that our Lord warns us. Thrice, in as many minutes, He demands of the multitude, “What went ye out to *see*? What went ye out to *see*? What went ye out to *see*?” Here was their error. Professing concern to know the will of God, to prepare themselves for his service and kingdom, they were bent on *sights*, on *spectacles*, on indulging their curiosity and love of the marvellous : they went out not to *hear* a prophet, but to *see* a prophet ; not to imitate the temperance and abstinence of the Baptist, but to gaze on a man who could prefer camel’s hair to soft clothing ; not to feel the divine regenerating wind of the Spirit, but to gape at the reed which shook and trembled in it. And this is the error against which we must guard. We are not to be overmuch concerned with the spectacular, the external, the marvellous in religion, but to fix our thoughts and affections on its interior and eternal realities. We are not to be too much taken up with questions of Church government and modes of worship, with the splendours of architecture and music, with the eloquence of the minister, nor with the desire to see visions and understand prophecies ; we are rather to seek edification, strength for duty, patience under affliction, communion with our Father who is in heaven and with our brother on earth. Above all, we are to seek that bond of perfectness, without which we are nothing, and have nothing, although we should speak with the tongues of men and of angels, although we should both prophesy and understand all mysteries,

although we should glow with the faith that removes mountains and the zeal which gives its goods to the poor and its body to the flames. Patient trust in God, a willing heart for duty, a cheerful courage under miseries, a constant kindness to our neighbour, even though he be unthankful; let us seek these first, and all other things will be added to us as we need them and can use them.

## II.

What went ye out into the wilderness to see? *A reed shaken by the wind?* " Once more we ask, What made our Lord select this figure? Was John the Baptist like a reed shaken by the wind? Was he not rather like the wind that shakes the reed? He was, and he was not. We may take which view we will; but, for the present, let us mark how truly the reed trembling in the wind sets him before us.

The reed and the wind! Here is the very emblem of strength in weakness, of weakness possessed by strength and indicating its presence. What is weaker than the reed? What stronger than the wind? Or what more impresses us with the presence and strength of the wind than the reed which waves to and fro in the blast? And was not John weak? Tradition portrays him as of a tall, gaunt, emaciated figure, more like an Arab than a Jew, worn by abstinence, by exposure, by the toil and fret of thought—with slender limbs and hollow eyes—a mere wandering voice. Yet what a power was in him! How the wind of God shakes him, and shakes stern music out of him! How this recluse, dwelling apart from men, knows the world, knows all sorts and conditions of men, reads their wants, their sins, and adapts his common message of Repentance to the soldier and the publican, to the Pharisee and the ruler! With what a noble daring he comes forth from his seclusion to confront the whole organization of society—an ancient civilization, a

priesthood consecrated from immemorial antiquity, the Rabbinical culture which lived in the affections of men, the popular sins which had long assumed the livery of duty, the violence of the troops, the peculation of government officials, the hypocrisy of Scribes eminent in the Church, the private and petted lusts of the king ! Of all, he demands repentance, faith, fruit. With no consecration and with no authority save that of Heaven ; with no followers, save such as he can win ; working no miracle, uttering no prediction, shewing no sign ; unknown, unannounced, unassisted ; his hand against every man that it may be for every man, he breaks on an astonished world, and conquers it for the time : for all Jerusalem, and all Judæa, and all the region round about, went out to him ; even the Pharisees, whom he denounced as a brood of vipers, came to his baptism ; even Herod, whose darling sin he rebuked, heard him gladly. The stiff-necked nation, with brows of brass, which would not listen to the calm gracious words of Jesus, utterly bowed down before this “ messenger ” of God, the emaciated recluse from the wilderness, this reed, so evidently shaken by the “ Spirit ” which “ bloweth where it listeth.” “ This,” they said, “ is a Prophet indeed ; this voice must be the voice of God ; this messenger must be the messenger of the Lord.” As of old, so now, they found the power of the Lord in tempest, and earthquake, and fire, not in the still small voice of love. They confessed that the spirit and power of Elijah were in John.

The reed, again, is pliable and changeful : it trembles and sways in the lightest air, to one point constant never. And yet, it is with the reed as with the vane ; although, and because, it is the very symbol of change, it is also the very symbol of fidelity. It is true—to the wind, and follows it with unswerving loyalty through all its changes, even to the faintest and most evanescent. And was not John faithful ?

Did not he bend to and follow the Spirit which visited him ; nay, follow *only* that ? If he was a reed, no breath of flattery, even though it came from a queen's lips, could move him ; and no blast of opposition, even though the voice of the mob roared in it. He stood calm and unbending before the multitude, before the Sanhedrin, before the king, faithful to the Spirit which animated him.

But if John could stand against some winds, and those strong winds, could he stand against all ? Did he not, once at least, yield to doubt, to hope deferred, to the bondage so intolerable to the free man of the desert ? When he was shut up in prison, did he not begin to ask himself whether Jesus was the Coming One or they must still look for another ? He did. But mark *where* even this wind of doubt drove him. It drove him to Christ, on whom he had seen the Spirit descend and rest. He doubts, and yet he is true ; the reed still turns to the wind—to the Spirit—to the Christ in whom the Spirit dwells. And so far as our Lord meant to compare John to “a reed shaken by the wind,” this perhaps is what He meant. He meant to say to the disciples who heard the Baptist's doubtful question, “John has changed, and yet you are not to think of him as changeable. The reed always yields to the wind ; but it always utters music—always gives the wind a voice—always speaks for God. And John, you see, still turns to the wind. In his utmost weakness and anguish he is faithful to Me, and to the Spirit which abides with Me. Has he a question to ask ? he asks it of Me. Has he a doubt to solve ? he comes to Me for the solution. When he is weak, then is he strong. You must not condemn him for this variation from his usual course. He has but varied with the wind. For it is the Spirit which has led him into the prison to be tempted, even as it was the Spirit which led Me into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. As I then turned to

the Father, so now John turns to the Son. Even this change in him is for the glory of God.”\*

It *was* for the glory of God. For, think how many hearts have been strengthened by his weakness, comforted by his discomfort, and have gained a firmer faith by the momentary wavering of his faith. When we have been tormented by doubt, when we have felt the dark shadows of the prison-house gathering about us, when we have had to suffer for our allegiance to truth till we doubted truth itself to be a liar; what new warmth and vigour and freedom of spirit have we gained as we remembered that even John doubted, and that Christ still honoured and loved him, and would not for a moment suffer the disciples to think hardly of him! That is a thought which has often carried light into darkness, strength to the infirm, and set at liberty them that were bound. And, therefore, the reed was still serving the wind, the Baptist was still serving the Spirit, when he sat in prison, and asked sadly, but still asked of *Christ*, “Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?”

The reed shaken by and serving the wind is, then, a true and graphic emblem of John's life. Is it not also a true emblem of what our life should be? Look at this emblem once more; and this time let us treat it more freely, and make a parable out of it for ourselves.

The reed, then, is weak and pliable; it bends to every passing breath, however faint. Yet all the winds that sweep over it come from God. It is his voice and his music,—and

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\* In the fact that the Lord Jesus was “led *into the wilderness* to be tempted of the devil,” there may be, I have sometimes thought, a hint that he was tempted to adopt the wilderness life, *i.e.*, the ascetic ideal of John, to take this short but steep cut to popularity; and that, while musing within himself whether or not this might be, the devil suggested other short cuts to popular acceptance which were by no means steep.

the music of the reed is often a *sighing* music,—which the reed utters ; for both reed and wind are of Him. But it utters them imperfectly, inarticulately, mysteriously. As we lie beside the stream and listen to the rustling reed, we feel that it says something to us, but we cannot tell what it says. Nay, we cannot even note its music on our gamut, nor arrange its sequent tones into a distinct melody. Its song is not only a song without words, but a song without notes—unscored, not to be caught, and fixed, and written down. Yet all the while it sighs out its mysterious tones, touching our hearts by its mystery as well as by its sweetness, it is gaining vigour, its fibres are being hardened and toned, the music of the wind and the water is entering into it and being stored up in it. And if now, when swept by many winds, it has reached its ripe maturity, you cut it down, death gives it a sweeter, more articulate, life. You can fashion a pipe out of it—as, indeed, the reed is the most ancient of musical instruments ; with deft fingers you may draw out its treasured sweetness, all that the wind and water have taught it : *now* it will render articulate notes and sequent melodies.

Which things are a parable of human life. Let the Baptist himself still be our illustration. *Living*, he spake as the Spirit gave him utterance. As the heavenly wind blew, so his music came. And what a mournful mysterious music it was ! what a sigh there is in his master-word—“Repent !” How uncertain, wavering, inarticulate *his* tones who now said, “This is He that should come,” and now, “Art Thou He that should come ?” *Being dead*, John still speaks to the world. He has become a pipe for the Spirit’s fingers, for the Spirit’s breath. And now, mark, how the sigh has gone out of his music, and the discords of doubt and contradiction. To us, his stern message, “Repent, Prepare, Amend : the Judge is at the door,” marks the most gracious

era in the world's history, the beginning of its new purer life; and, as we listen to it, it modulates into the tender invitation, "Believe, Trust, Hope; for the Saviour has come through the door, and brought redemption for the world." On us John no longer makes changeful and conflicting impressions, no longer says, "This is He," and "Is it He?" We do not say of him, "Weak and variable as the reed!" we rather say, "Faithful as the reed to the wind!" for we have learned that, in whatever he said, he was taught by the Spirit for our good; all his words run into a clear loyal testimony to the Lord's Christ, his very weakness helps to make us strong, and we honour and love him as a true prophet and very much more than a prophet. The feeble reed sighing in the breeze has become a pipe on which the Holy Ghost discourses sweet clear music to us.

Come nearer home. Were not the friends whose memory we most cherish when they were with us reeds shaken by the wind? In large measure they were the creatures of their circumstances, and were formed by the influences which surrounded them. There was much strength and sweetness in them which found no adequate expression because of their infirmities, their defects of will or taints of blood; or there was much in them which we could not understand and approve—discords between faith and practice, between prayer and conduct, between their ideals and their lives. Now they said one thing to us, and again another; now, "Strive for heaven;" now, "Live for earth:" now, "Deny yourselves;" and now, "Indulge yourselves." They could not beat their music out into clear articulate tones, and sequent melodies, and rich accordant harmonies. It was little more than a sigh, sweet but sad; often most sweet, yet capable of many interpretations. Yet, all the while they were with us, these reeds were growing, their fibres taking new vigour, and treasuring

up the music of the heavenly influences that blew upon them. And now that Death has cut them down, what has he made of them but instruments in the Spirit's hands? What clear happy music they discourse to us now! All the discords and contradictions have passed away. We forget what was earthly and imperfect in them. They are pure heavenly to us. We think of them as men and women whose lives were kind and sweet and holy, who did us only good, and who now stand on the heavenly shore, without stain or defect, watching our struggle with native imperfections, bidding us be of good heart, and beckoning us upward to the blessed perfection in which they dwell.

Come quite home. Ask yourselves whether *this* is not the true ideal of our life?—That, while we are on earth, we should be as the reed shaken by and serving the wind, yielding to the Divine Spirit, following Him and bearing witness to Him in all our changes; loyal to Him, even though to be loyal we must often lash the earth, or be bruised against the tumultuous waters, or be torn on the hard sharp rocks. Our language may be often nothing but a sigh over the mysteries of life, over the dark problems we cannot solve; and, indeed, reeds that lie under the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world have but a hard time of it, and may well sigh, and even groan. But if we are faithful to the promptings of the Divine Spirit, if we yield to his constraints, we are gathering strength and sweetness of character; we are attuning ourselves for his uses; we are preparing ourselves for happier service. When Death cuts us down, *we* may become instruments more meet for the Spirit's hands, and pour forth clearer richer strains. *Then* we shall beat our music out at last, and all the discords of earth and time will pass away from us for ever.

Is not this, I ask, a true ideal? that, living, we be reeds bending before the Spirit of all truth and grace, and dying,

pipes to utter his praise in larger sweeter tones ; living, his ; dying, still more perfectly his. And perhaps, you reply, “ Yes, that is a sufficiently true and lofty ideal of life. But what purpose does it serve to place these lofty unattainable ideals before us, save to fill our hearts with sadness and regret ? We cannot rise to them, and realize them. If we are reeds, we are reeds which, for the most part, lie in the mire of common life, and rarely lift our heads to feel the heavenly breath.” But for what do we worship God and study his holy Word, if it be not for this very purpose,—To have the ideal of life lifted before us again and again, that we may both see how far we fall short of it, and nerve ourselves to new endeavours after it ? If, indeed, we could speak to each other only of the reed, we might well despond ; but we have to speak of the wind as well as of the reed, of the pure strong Spirit of the pure strong Son of God, as well as of these weak mire-haunting hearts of ours. And as we speak, O grace of Heaven ! the Spirit Himself descends to breathe on us, to lift us from the dust, to inspire us with new strength, to put a growing music into our hearts and lives. Let us but trust in Him, and yield to his sacred kindly influences, and we too, weak as we are, and many as are the discords which still put us out of tune with Heaven, shall beat our music out at last, and take our part in the chorus of perfect service and perfect praise.

## XI.

## Blind Bartimæus.

ST. MARK X. 46—52.

BARTIMÆUS sits by the wayside begging, hard by one of the gates of Jericho, having for sole companion, as we learn from St. Matthew, a beggar as poor and blind as himself. The gate of the city was, in the East, the favourite resort of the mendicant class; for there, not only must all travellers, and caravans, and peasants bringing their wares to market pass them by, but the broad side-arches of the gate, with their cool recesses and divans, were the justice-halls in which suits and quarrels were adjusted, and the lounging-place in which, when the labours of the day were over, the citizens gathered to discuss their local politics or to enjoy their neighbourly gossip. The very reason, therefore, which draws the beggars of Italy to the fountains or the steps of churches, and the beggars of Ireland to the doors of hotels, or to the spots haunted by tourists, and the beggars of England to the crowded thoroughfares and market-places, drew the beggars of the East, and still draws them, to the gates of the cities. There men most congregate, and there they are most likely to meet some response to their appeals for pity and help.

Bartimæus sits, then, by the wayside, at the gate of Jericho. He has taken small alms on the day we meet him, for as yet only a few persons have gone by; but from within

the walls he hears the stir of an unwonted excitement and joy. At last the whole city pours through the gate—a great multitude in the midst of which walks the Rabbi of Nazareth whose name had of late been in all men's mouths. The multitude greet Him with "hosannas;" and with a sure instinct Bartimæus feels that a happy chance has come to him at last, that the Rabbi, who has healed so many, will heal him, if only he can draw attention to his misery. But the blind man cannot adventure himself into the surging crowd, lest, jostled and trampled on, he become lame and crippled as well as blind. He can only sit by the wayside, crying for mercy, conscious that his voice is drowned in the shouts of the throng. Nay, his fellow-townsmen, who might have shewn him some little sympathy and goodwill, take his cry as a discord in the harmony of their joy, and bid him hold his peace. The rebuke of those who go before Christ is taken up by those who come after Him; in all the crowd there is not one who feels for him. Yes, there is *one*, though only one. *Jesus* stands still, and commands that Bartimæus come to Him. Casting aside his garment, the blind beggar hastens forward, asks for sight, receives his sight, and uses his sight to "follow *Jesus* in the way" He went.

Let us consider this story, and mark, at least in a few points, what light it throws—first, on the character and mission of our Lord, and, secondly, on the character and faith of Bartimæus.

1. We take first those points which speak to us of *our Lord*.

And at the very outset we are struck by the obvious fact that, though attended by a wondering joyful crowd, He has an ear, and grace, and gifts for the one. A great multitude went before and came after Him. The whole city was moved

by his presence, and streamed out of the gate to escort Him. The air is thick with shouts of joy and admiration. The breath of popular applause, for once, floats round that sacred Head which found no pillow till it was laid in the grave. A happy excited throng fills the highway; and by the wayside, wrapt in darkness, there sits a beggar who is blind, and whose blindness is more intolerable than ever now that so great a sight is passing by. Has the long-promised "Son of David" come at last, then? and is he not so much as to look upon his face? Is he—he alone—not to "see the salvation of God?" The sense of his misery grows so keen, so intolerable, that, though he can hardly hope to be heard, he cries, "Son of David, have mercy on me! Son of David, have mercy on me!" "Be quiet, can't you, then?" growls the crowd. "What mean you by marring our festivity by your pitiful outcry? Do you suppose that He will pause in his triumph to hear what *you* have to say?" And still the blind man, disheartened but not silenced, cries on, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

And Christ, does *He* pass on, unconscious of the prayer, or serenely indifferent to the misery of the one, because so many are happy? Not He; He were not Christ if He did. He halts; the crowd hushes to learn why He lingers; He commands that the blind man be brought to Him. And *now* the officious crowd, now that the Hero of the hour condescends to notice Bartimæus, are forward with their sympathy: "Be of good comfort; rise, He calleth thee."

Are we to take this ready sympathy as a natural human kindness breaking out so soon as their attention is really fixed on the beggar's misery, and they see that there is some hope of helping him? or are we to take it only as the fussy officiousness of those who wait on the wishes of the great, and seek to push themselves into notice even when they help a neighbour? Probably it was both. But because

we ourselves are men, and are no whit better than our fellows, let us at least hope that the better motive was the stronger, and that the thoughtless crowd, when once compelled to think of him, felt a genuine pity for the unhappy mendicant.

Nor let us fail to mark that as Jesus, followed by many, has grace for one, so also it is to the one *miserable* man that He turns from the happy crowd. For we are very apt to fear that, as the Lord of all, who has so many dependent on his care, our distress may well be overlooked by Him. As we remember that the cries of all creatures in all worlds rise into his ear, that a voluminous sea of complex sounds is for ever breaking round his seat, it seems well-nigh incredible that He should have any special care for us, or that our weak appeal should penetrate that vast complexity of sighs, shrieks, groans, prayers, thanksgivings, songs. And this fear is commonly strongest when we are weakest. In our times of trouble we find it very hard to persuade ourselves that He cares for us, and listens to every word we say. We look out from our darkened life, and the whole world seems to give the lie to any such hope. All things go on as of old. The sun shines ; the flowers bloom ; the sweet summer wind is heavy with fragrance ; the birds are merry in their choirs ; men and women are absorbed in their several avocations—too absorbed to waste a thought on us. Our darkness has not darkened the world ; our loss is no loss to our neighbours. Heaven and earth smile a serene, a cruel, indifference to our grief. Can it be that God, who rules earth and heaven, and who seems so remote, so inaccessible, can it be that *He* has any sympathy with us ! It can hardly be. We are alone, un comforted, in our misery.

*That* is a heartache which we have most of us felt, and yet a heartache which, thank God, we never need feel. For see, here, in the flesh, is the very God of whom we have

often had such hard and bitter thoughts. The day is bright and fair. "Jericho-town is full of joy." With Christ in their midst, the happy multitude stream along the highway, leaping, and shouting, and praising God. As yet *they* have no sympathy with the darkness in which Bartimæus sits, vaguely crying for pity. But that one sorrowful cry pierces the very heart of Christ. He *cannot* pass on till it be hushed. He leaves the many happy for the one solitary and miserable soul. The happiness is no happiness to Him, unless all may share it. *He* pities the blind beggar; nay, He makes the gay thoughtless crowd pity him too. Let us take *that* comfort to our hearts, so often as we are lonely, and sorrowful, and hopeless.

You have seen a mother laughing and making merry with happy friends. Suddenly she pauses, listens, and leaves the noisy room. She has heard a tiny wail of distress which you could not hear, and she cannot be content till the cry of her babe be hushed, its wants satisfied. And shall God, who made the mother's heart, be less tender, less pitiful, than the creature He has made? I tell you, Nay; but "as one whom his mother comforteth," so will God comfort all the distressed who cry to Him.

No sooner did blind Bartimæus hear that the Son of David had called him, than, "*casting aside his garment,*" that there may be no tardiness on his part, he rose and came to Jesus. A faith so prompt and vigorous pleases Jesus well; and, to reward it, He virtually places Himself and his whole power at the beggar's disposal. He asks, "What wilt thou that I should do for thee?" really meaning, "You have called on me. Here I stand, wholly at your service. Take what you will, what you can." The best thing the blind man can ask for is eyes. And so Bartimæus answers, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." Mark the Lord's reply, how it is a mere echo of the prayer. "Lord, that I may *receive my sight,*"

asks Bartimæus ; “ *Receive thy sight,*” responds Christ, granting the very boon asked of Him in the very words in which it had been asked.

And, as we all know, there is one of the secrets of the spiritual life here. Christ gives us just as much as we can take—as much even as we really ask for. For no good man really desires to have more than he can use aright, use for the best ends in the best way. Whatever form our prayers may assume, whatever words we may utter, this is the upshot of all our prayers : “ Lord, give us as much as we can use, as much as we can enjoy, as much as we can turn to good account.” To have more than *that* would not be well for us ; nor, in our best moods, do we desire more. And there is no conceivable reason why God should not give us so much as that. All things are in his hand, for the good of all. And if *we* can use any gift for the benefit of the rest, why should He not bestow it upon us ? If we cry, “ Lord, give us sight, knowledge, wisdom,”—not intending our neighbour’s good, but only our own aggrandizement, He may say, “ Children, you had better sit in the dark till you can use the light for nobler ends.” But if, like Bartimæus, we ask for sight that we may behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus, and find our way to follow where He leads, then to our “ Lord, that we may receive our sight,” the echo will come, prompt and clear, “ Receive thy sight ; and come, follow Me in the paths of service and charity.”

The Lord is with us still. He hears every cry which rises from our hearts. He looks round on us with the tender self-granting grace with which He looked on Bartimæus, saying to us as to him, “ What will ye that I should do for you ?” Ask, and ye shall have. If you are blind, and cannot see Him ; if you are deaf, and cannot hear Him ; nay, if you doubt his presence, and can only cry in hope that by some dubious happy chance He *may* be near, He

will open your eyes, and unstop your ears, and grant you the very desire of your hearts.

Blind Bartimæus got what he asked then ; but he also got more than he asked. To the cure he sought, Jesus added an interpreting word, “Go thy way, *thy faith hath saved thee.*” Thy faith hath saved thee! Was that quite true? Was it not the healing power of Christ that saved him? No doubt it was the “virtue,” the “saving health,” that went out of the Son of Man, which wrought the cure. But He who did not clutch at his equality with the Father was not forward to claim the merit of his works. He advances no such claim here. So to speak, He throws the whole credit of the miracle on the faith which cried for mercy. And it was quite true that it was the faith of Bartimæus which saved him, though it was not the whole truth ; for when Christ is present the only condition of healing is that men believe in Him. He is full of health, full of virtue ; and it is our faith which makes his virtue, his health, ours. And surely it was wise and gracious of the Lord Jesus to lay this stress on faith ; to call the thoughts of the blind man from the mere marvel to its meaning, from that which was outward and temporal to that which was spiritual and within. Bartimæus would be in danger of thinking too much of his recovered sight, of dwelling too exclusively on the mere physical wonder ; and therefore Christ recalls his thoughts to the spiritual condition of healing, and virtually says to him, “It is *faith* that made you whole. Think of *that*, of the mighty power it is, and of how much more than mere sight you may gain by it.”

This, then, is the Christ whom God has set forth to teach us what He Himself is like, and to save us from our sins,—this great Teacher and Healer, who leaves the many for the one, the happy for the sorrowful, who waits to give us all of

good that we can take, and who cares more for our welfare and happiness than to get the glory which is his due.

2. Let us now glance at *Bartimæus and his faith*. It is to his "faith" that our Lord attributes his healing: it is to his faith, therefore, that our attention is specially called. And surely it was a faith surprisingly great. As he sits, wrapt in darkness, by the wayside, he hears the approach of a noisy joyful crowd. Unable to see, he asks what it all meant. He is told that "Jesus the Nazarene passeth by." Had he heard nothing of Jesus before he would have concluded Him to be some traveller of note whom the city delighted to honour, and would at most, if he asked anything, have asked an alms of Him. That he asks first "mercy," and then "sight," proves, I think, that he must have heard of the Nazarene, at least as a prophet who wrought signs and wonders. As he sat by the gate, travellers may have brought him the good news from Galilee or Jerusalem; or he may have heard the citizens in their evening gatherings narrate some of those stories of healing which are recorded in our Gospels, and even discuss the question, which was then being discussed throughout Judea, whether this Rabbi of Nazareth were or were not the promised Messiah. Bartimæus has arrived at a conclusion of his own. To the blind man, He that can give sight to the blind needs no other credential. He *must* be of God: and if he claim to be "the Son of David," *i.e.*, the Messiah, He *is* the Messiah. This seems to have been the secret logic of Bartimæus, and if he can only put the Nazarene to the test, and finds that He *can* open blind eyes, he for one will be well content to receive Him as Son of David and Son of God. Hence he sits by the wayside, crying, "*O Son of David*, have mercy on me!" for if the Nazarene claims that title of honour, it will be better,

thinks Bartimæus, to give it Him even before the cure is wrought, and so perhaps incline Him to perform the cure.

Had Jesus passed on, shewing no sign of grace, Bartimæus might have changed his thought of Him—*might*, though it is by no means certain that he would; for there was a singular vitality and pertinacity in his faith. It was not to be easily suppressed. The crowd about Christ, who were surely most likely to know the mind of Christ, bid the beggar hold his peace; they “rebuke” him for intruding his misery on the general joy; they “charge” him to leave Jesus untroubled by his vain pitiful outcries. If the poor wretch had given up all hope; if he had said within himself, “These men who see the Nazarene, and have been long with Him, must know what He is like, and what He is likely to do, better than I can; I may as well spare my breath:” could we have been much surprised? We should have had little reason for surprise. What is really surprising is that, undeterred by the unanimous opinion and rebuke of the crowd—undeterred, but not I dare say without some sinking of heart, some abatement of hope—he should cry so much the more a great deal, “O Son of David, have mercy on me!”

It is all of a piece with this vital pertinacious faith that, so soon as Christ bids him “come,” he flings aside his long flowing garment in order that he may come the more quickly; that, when Christ places his Divine power absolutely at the blind man’s disposal, he should at once endeavour to apply it to that in himself which was weakest and most defective: and that, so soon as he had received his sight, he should use his sight to follow Jesus in the way, thus “glorifying God” for the wonder He had wrought. It was faith, and faith of an admirable strength and constancy, that saved him.

Now if we use the story of Bartimæus, or the part he

plays in this story, as a glass in which we may see both ourselves and him, we shall surely find that face answers to face and heart to heart.

For instance, if the blind man of Judea saw further and more clearly into the character and work of Jesus than the seeing multitude, there are surely many blind men among us, men—*i.e.*, whose eyes are absolutely closed on that knowledge of Life and Nature which springs from culture, who nevertheless have a very clear and deep insight into the mysteries of truth and godliness. I think we must all have known “babes and sucklings” who were familiar with spiritual truths which are often hidden from the eyes of the wise and prudent, and out of whose mouths God perfected a sweeter praise than even the noble hymn which Science sings. Knowledge is good; but it is not the highest good. The faith which inspires charity is better than even the knowledge which leads to wisdom; though best of all is the charity which, born of faith, puts on wisdom. However high the esteem in which we hold the discoveries of Science, though we rank them only below the disclosures of Inspiration, we must still admit that there is no direct connection between a scientific acquaintance with the mysteries of Nature and an apprehension of those spiritual mysteries of which Nature is the open and manifold parable. Blind men, *i.e.*, men blind to the wonders and charms of Science, may nevertheless have eyes for the truths which centre in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord; while men with eyes for all that Science discovers may be blind to his claims, and see no beauty in Him that they should desire Him.

Nay, what is stranger still, the very Church itself may use its dogmatic spectacles till it lose all power of seeing Jesus as He is, and may follow Him till it rebuke and withstand the sinful and miserable souls whom He calls to his grace. Nothing is more probable indeed than that, when

you have heard that Jesus, the Saviour, passeth by, when from your sorrowful darkness and loneliness you cry to Him for mercy, you will be rebuked by those who go before and come after Him. Those who stand nearest Christ, or think they do, who assume to follow Him most closely, are only too likely to meet you with that *doctrinal* rebuke, in which long use has taught them skill. They will say to you, "Christ will never hear you while you call on Him in that blind ignorant way. You must catch our shibboleth and pass our tests. Do you believe in original sin, in human depravity, in the election of God, in justification by faith, in the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, in the damnation of those who do not believe what we teach?" and so on through all the strangling technicalities of their inflexible creed. Till you can satisfy them that on all points you are "sound," they have no hope that your cry for mercy will be heard. Virtually they demand that you be whole *before* you come to Christ for healing.

Again, as from those who follow Christ you will be likely to hear the doctrinal rebuke, so also from those who affect to *go before* Christ you will probably receive the *philosophical* rebuke. If they hear you confessing your darkness and praying for light, they will be apt to say, "You really need make no such outcry as that. God is all goodness. He takes no note of what you call your sins. After all, you have only been the creature of your blood and your conditions, and you are not responsible for these. You are sound and healthy enough, if you would but think so. Don't wait for Him; come with us: and in any case pray put an end to these unmanly and disturbing cries."

Now, as of old, the Divine Healer and Saviour is too often surrounded by a rebuking crowd who, even when they feign or try to help us to his presence, still keep us at a distance from Him. There is the more need, therefore, that

we should take pattern by Bartimæus. The more the crowd rebuked *him*, so much the more a great deal he cried for mercy. Whatever they said, he would not hold his peace. They might leave him sitting by the wayside solitary and forlorn; they might gather closer round the Master, and with their loud hymns of praise drown his imploring cries. Still he would cry; and if there were in very deed a *Saviour* in the crowd, He at least would listen and be gracious. And so, when the blessing for which he longed seemed slipping past him, the danger of losing it only redoubled the fervour and passion of his prayer. Let us learn a lesson from him. When men rebuke us and our cry for Divine help, when the very Church rebukes us because we do not speak her language, let us cry so much the more. In dogma, in knowledge, in ecclesiastical form and privilege, they may stand near to Christ and yet be far from Him. They may "go before" Him, yet not to prepare his way. They may "follow after" Him, yet have little of his Spirit. What have we to do with them? *They* cannot heal us, nor can they withhold us from the healing grace of Christ, if we will not let them. He stands among them, seeking to draw all men unto Himself, willing that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Above all the clamour of their rebukes his gracious voice is heard saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that are sinful, penitent, sorrowful; I will heal you, and save you, and give you rest." Let us but make our appeal to Him, and we need not doubt that, through all the hosannas of the Church and all the hallelujahs of Heaven, our cry for mercy will reach his ear, and He will answer and save and bless us.

Nor let us think too hardly even of those who rebuke us; for they also serve a useful purpose in the Divine economy. Bartimæus would not have cried so long and loud if the multitude about Christ had not charged him to hold his

peace. It was the fear that he might not be heard, that the happy chance of healing might escape him, which moved him to impassioned and importunate supplication. And the same fear moves us to the same fervour. If we were likely to lose our Bible, how earnestly and constantly we should read it, though now perchance it often lies unopened on the shelf. If all our Chapels and Churches were about to be closed, how eagerly we should flock to them, though now perhaps a very slight hindrance will suffice to keep us away. Because we do not use and value our blessings as we should, God often alarms us with the fear of loss, and sometimes takes them from us for a time. *Then* we feel their worth, and cry out so much the more to have them restored. And so, in like manner, even the crowd about Christ stimulates our desire to see Him for ourselves; and their rebukes deepen our desire; and the very difficulties they put in our way rouse the spirit by which we overget them. The one good use to which we can put these hindrances and rebukes is all the more resolutely to push forward. The only lawful and happy revenge we can take on those who would fain keep us from Christ is to press the more earnestly into his presence, and, when once we have seen Him for ourselves, smooth the way for *their* approach.

## XII.

## Echoes of the Gospel in Nature.

ST. MARK xvi. 12.

ST. MARK tells us of two disciples to whom, “as *they walked and went into the country*” the Lord Jesus “appeared in another form” than that with which they were familiar. We all know who these two men were ; that they were the two disciples—Cleopas and his companion—who went to Emmaus on the third day after Jesus was crucified and slain.\* They had been up to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of the Passover. They had seen Jesus put to death. They knew that his body had been laid in a new sepulchre hewn in Joseph’s garden. They had tarried in the city till noon of the third day after his death, with some faint hope, perhaps, that it would be even as He had said ; that, in some mysterious way, He would rise from the grave and reappear among men. On the morning of their journey, before they started, they had heard some confused rumour of his tomb having been found empty, and of a vision of angels, granted to certain women of their company, which said that He was alive. But, with what seems an unaccountable dullness, they had not stayed to investigate this rumour, and learn whether or not it were true. After midday, they set out on their seven miles’ walk, that they might reach home

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\* Luke xxiv. 13—35.

before the sun set; and, as they walked, they disputed with each other of all the things that had recently happened in Jerusalem, and were oppressed with profound sadness as they concluded they could no longer hope that Jesus was He who should redeem Israel. As "they communed together, and reasoned" themselves into despair, Jesus Himself overtook them, and went with them. And it surely is a signal proof of his grace that, even to men so dull and faithless, He should manifest Himself, and prove that He was risen indeed. He comes to them; but He comes "in another form" than that to which they were accustomed—not in "the natural body" of his humiliation, but in "the spiritual body" of his resurrection. At first this strange form baffles them; their eyes are "holden," so that they do not know Him. But their hearts burn within them as He talks with them by the way; and, at last, when they reach the house, and sit down to meat with Him, He is known to them in the breaking of the bread. Either his characteristic manner of dividing the loaf, as some suppose, or, as others suppose, the peculiar words of benediction He was wont to utter as he sat down to meat, recalled Him to their thoughts. They looked, and lo! it was He Himself!—the very Lord whose absence they had mourned.

This is the original reference and meaning of St. Mark's words. It is not my present purpose, however, to dwell on the story of which they form part, or on the lessons it suggests. I have another, and a more *seasonable*\* application of the words in view. To these two disciples, *as they walked and went into the country*, Jesus revealed Himself in another form to that which He had worn to them as they sat at his feet and learned of Him. And this fact suggests a common fact of human experience, viz., that *when we go into the*

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\* Written in Autumn.

country, when we walk amid hills and woods, fields and streams, *Christ is still with us*, still talking to us, though He comes "in another form" to that in which we conceive of Him as we read the Word or worship in the Sanctuary, and speaks to us in other tones. Often, too, no doubt, *our* eyes are "holden." We are so dull that we do not recognize his presence as we breathe the pure air of the mountains or of the sea. We do not hear his voice in the song of birds, in the susurrus of the trees, in the rippling music of wayside brooks, or in the thunders of the surf. Or, if we dimly apprehend a Divine Presence, the God we apprehend is not the God we meet in the Bible. The words He speaks to us do not frame themselves into a Gospel of redemption.

Now, as I was lately walking down the charming stretch of road which lies between Capel Curig and Bettws-y-Coed, it occurred to me that, if we will, we may not only see God on the mountains and the lakes, but God *in Christ*; that we may hear not only the whispers of a Divine goodness, but the very Gospel of our salvation; and it may help others to happier thoughts than mine if I try to utter the thoughts that then came to me, and shew how we may find the truths most distinctive of the Christian Gospel in the fair and liberal scenes of Nature.

If we ask, What does the Bible teach us of God and our relation to Him? and, above all, what does it teach us of the person, work, and passion of Christ Jesus the Lord?—the answer, in general terms, would be this. The Bible teaches, and, most of all, Christ teaches us that, though we have sinned against Him, though we have degraded and defiled the nature which He made pure and upright, God loves us with an inalienable love; that this love is a *redeeming* love, a love ever seeking our deliverance from evil; that this redeeming love *will* take effect on us at last, and

that, when we are reconciled to Him, God and man will dwell together and work together in a life far more full, and rich, and happy than any we have yet attained. Is not that, in outline, what we mean by the Gospel of the grace of God—a redemption from sin to holiness, and, through holiness, to eternal life and joy?

Well, it is precisely this Gospel which, when our eyes are opened, we may find, point by point, in the large and lovely scenes of the natural world, as a very few words will suffice to shew.

1. For example. It is hardly possible for any man, whose mind is at all open and sensitive, to doubt the love of God as he considers the varied and exquisite loveliness of the world which He has fashioned for us. Go where we will, we find a Divine wisdom and care at work to make the world, not only habitable to us, but beautiful and full of exquisite delights. The farther we go from the haunts of men, the more pure and splendid are the scenes that meet our eyes and gratify every sense. It is not only that, as we climb remote and difficult mountains, we find all things—air, water, soil, lichens, grass, ferns, wild flowers—of the most delicate and ethereal purity, and gaze on landscapes so large and grand that the whole soul is flooded by a sense of the Divine grace and bounty. It is not only that as we cross broad desolate moors, rarely trodden by the foot of man, we gaze on miles and miles of the purest and richest hues—purple heather, golden gorse, ferns that sweep the whole gamut of colour, from the tenderest greys, through greens, and yellows, and browns, to russet reds—and tread on a turf the sweetest, and purest, and most elastic. But go where we may—to sea, to lake, to babbling roadside brook, to wood or copse, to field or hedgerow—if they have not been marred and polluted by man, we find in them all

the most lavish bounty, the most subtle, exquisite, and varied beauty, the most perfect and tender purity. There is no unregarded nook which, in its pure natural beauty, does not surpass the most perfect garden planned by the science of man. There is hardly a wild flower which, in purity or richness of tone and in the free grace of its outlines, does not excel the last product of human skill—the very thistle “outriddens all our voluptuous garden roses.” Scenes never as yet trodden by human feet are at least as lavish and pure in their loveliness as those which draw pilgrims from the ends of the earth. It is as though God delighted in purity and beauty *for their own sake*; it is as though He *could not* open his hands without adding to the gift He bestows whatever will enrich, and adorn, and perfect it. If, as we “walk and go into the country,” we simply permit the scenes through which we pass to make their natural impression on us, we shall never doubt God to be a holy God, so exquisite is the purity of his works; we shall never doubt Him to be good and kind, so lavish and unsparing is his bounty; we shall never doubt Him to be perfect and altogether lovely, so marvellous and divine is the beauty of all that He has created and made. Theology has often portrayed Him as a harsh and austere Master, reaping where He has not sown, and gathering where He has not strewn; but to *that* theology Nature gives the lie through all her mountains, and rocks, and woods, and streams. Listen to her voice, and you will find it in happy accord with the voice of the Bible: they both proclaim that God is love; they both reveal a God who is good, and who doeth good continually.

2. But if we are to be at peace, we must know the love of God to be *a redeeming love*; for, though we forget it at times amid the toils and excitements of our common life, we

have the deepest sense of sin ; and sin compels us to fear the God in whom we ought to delight. When we wake trembling in the night, and feel that only God is with us in the darkness, or that only He can save us from the perils and terrors that haunt the darkness, our first emotion is not always that of confidence and repose, although we know God to be good and of a most tender mercy. Nay, even when we stand on a lonely mountain peak, amid a sea of lofty crests, looking down on pass, and valley, and far-stretching miles of plain, there are moods in which the very grandeur and beauty of the scene impress our own sinfulness upon us ; only God, the good kind Father, is with us, and yet we are bowed down by a sense of our unworthiness to dwell in a world so fair ; because we are conscious of his presence we feel that we are unclean.

But is there nothing in Nature which bears a more definite and precise witness to our guilt ? Is there nothing to remind us that, despite our guilt, God loves us and will redeem us ? There is much. As I have already said, if we would see Nature in its perfect beauty, we must get beyond the haunts of men. Wherever man is, or goes, Nature loses some of her purity and charm. In travelling to Wales, for instance, you pass through a country once as lovely as most. But now, during part of the journey, you advance from one hideous town to another, each looking more black, and grimy, and dreary than the last ; tall chimneys belching out smoke and flame in the face of day, the earth loaded with a weary weight of dismal houses, the green fields blackened and laid waste with furnaces or buried under piles of broken pottery. As you go through Flint and Denbighshire, on the one hand the bright sea breaking on the shore, and on the other the mountains rising in the blue distance, you come on mining towns, or towns in which there are filthy chemical works and manu-

factories of manures, and find the pure air poisoned with noisome stench, and the fair landscape made hideous with mean houses and ugly sheds, and all the dreary débris which commerce leaves behind it. Nay, as you climb Snowdon itself, in the very heart of the mountain, you light on a dismal tramway, with its rotting sleepers and rusty rails, and are led to the mouth of an exhausted mine; and round the mine's mouth there lie heaps of slag and refuse under which the mountain mourns. Nay, worse still, wander in the most unfrequented spots, on mountains to which no tourist comes, and you fall in with a cottage here and there, and see the ground trodden into mire, and all the filth of the stable carefully collected about the door; while pigs, and dogs, and fowls make themselves as much at home within the hut as its human inmates; the little stream that runs by is all stained and discoloured, not through any excessive addiction of the cottagers to wash or bathe in it; an air of impurity and discomfort hangs round the whole place. In short, you cannot anywhere meet the traces of man, whether it be in the Fairy Glen, all strewn with sandwich-papers and broken beer-bottles after an excursion, or on the mountain plateau one or two thousand feet above the sea, where a single family passes its days, without feeling that man is out of harmony with Nature, that he has not yet learned to live on good terms with her, that he spoils and vulgarizes the loveliness to which he resorts. Could that be so if man were what God meant him to be? Must he not have fallen from his high estate if, in the very garden which God planted for him, his presence is a pollution and a desecration? Does not Nature herself emphatically bear witness that we are degraded and sinful, that we are not what God meant us to be, that we do not live as He meant us to live? He surely intended man not only to be the most perfect work of his hands, but to give a crowning

grace to the natural world. Till we have learned so to live in the world as to add to its beauty instead of marring it, to enhance its purity instead of polluting it, we may know that we have fallen, that we are degraded and unclean. Every spot defiled and deformed by man is virtually a testimony to the fact that we have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

But if there are voices in Nature which attest the sin of man, are there none which speak of the redeeming love of God? Ah! see how patiently all the great forces of Nature strive to correct the foul habits of men, to save them from the worst effects of their own ignorance, and carelessness, and neglect; to throw a veil of beauty over the ugliness and deformity they too often create! If you go to some favourite watering-place, and mark how the even beauty of the rippling sands is broken up, and the purity of air and sea tarnished, if not destroyed, by the floods of vile refuse which the adjacent town pours out through a hundred throats, you may also see how pure mighty winds, that have swept across leagues of ocean, drive away the miasmas; how birds, and fish, and sunshine combine to remove or destroy the noxious refuse; how tide after tide the sea sweeps up, and leaves once more a level beach all vital with graceful lines and tender curves. If, as you wander among the mountains, you come on a cottage whose inmates, in their sordid ignorance and sluttishness, seem to strive against all the wholesome influences of the pure air they breathe, the pure soil they tread, the pure water that runs by their door, you may also see how Nature perpetually strives with them, and overcomes them, and blesses them in their own despite; how she pours around them floods of sweet air which they cannot quite shut out, and dancing musical streams of water whose purity they cannot altogether defile; how she renews the sweetness of the soil they

have polluted, and compels them, that they may live, to a measure and kind of exercise which holds them in health : how she patiently paints frescoes of lichens on the stones they have hewn from the rock, and plants grasses, and foxgloves, and ferns in the bare ugly walls they have built, and weaves a web of transcendent beauty over the ruins they have made. As you stand on the summit of some lofty peak, and feel the mighty waves of air sweep by you, and see a hundred streams leaping down its sides, and the calm broad lakes sleeping at its feet, you become feelingly aware that there are restorative redeeming forces in Nature which must prevail over all the folly, and vileness, and uncleanness of man. You never doubt on which side the ultimate victory will be. You rest in the assurance that, whatever the sin of man, God's righteousness must win at the last.

3. The Gospel teaches us that, when God's righteousness *has* overcome human guilt, God and man will dwell together and work together in a sacred concord—that we shall enter on a life higher, richer, fuller than any to which we have yet attained. And even of this truth, even of this bright hope, we catch some hints and glimpses in the natural world. Much as man does to deform and pollute the spots in which he dwells, it is nevertheless true that Nature is not perfect without him ; that the whole creation *travails* and groans until “the redemption” comes. The sea is pure, and beautiful, and grand ; but no sea rises to its perfect loveliness, or its perfect grandeur, until the white sails of our ships are reflected in its bosom, or we see some gallant vessel contending with the storm. The earth is pure and beautiful, and rich in scenes of grandeur or comeliness ; you may find a thousand sequestered nooks which combine all that delights us in hills, and trees, and streams, in turf, and flowers, and the songs of birds : but no

landscape, however fair, reaches its full interest and beauty unless we see a white cottage in the distance, embowered among the trees, and sending up its blue curling smoke to the blue sky. There is something wanting—we all feel it—in every scene, unless it hold some sign of human presence.

And what does *that* teach, if not that God made the earth for man, that He intended him to live in such happy content and harmony with the forces and creatures of the natural world as that man himself should be its prime beauty, and his presence the spell that awakens it to its most perfect life? Who can mark how kindly Nature adopts man and all his works, even now that in much man is out of tune with heaven and earth—who can mark that tender adoptive love and not look forward to a day when we shall be at peace with the world in which we sojourn; when we shall so build our cities as that all the health-giving, beauty-creating, energies of Nature shall have free play in them, and so do our work as to enhance rather than mar the loveliness of whatever we touch; when we shall rise to so complete a knowledge of Nature's secrets as that we shall be able to make her our docile servant, our constant friend, and learn to work with her with a precision and beauty as exquisite as her own; when the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for us, because we can cause them to blossom into new perfection and bring them even a higher grace than their own?

In all these ways, then, Nature faithfully echoes the truths of the Gospel. We should never have found such meanings in the natural world, indeed, if we had not read the Gospel of the grace of God in Holy Writ. But now that we have read it, we may hear Nature herself reminding us that we are degraded by sin; that God loves us notwithstanding our

sins ; that this love is a love which redeems from sin and restores health to the soul : and that, when his redeeming love has taken full effect upon us, we shall once more have dominion over the works of his hands, even the stones of the field will be at peace with us, and the very stars in their courses will fight on our behalf.

So that when we “walk and go into the country” Christ, the very Christ of the Gospels, is still with us, though “in another form,” and still, if only we have ears to hear, He urges upon us the warnings and invitations of his grace. Let us listen to Him. If we have grown dull to words we have often heard or read from the Bible ; if the familiar, the august yet tender, Form which moves before us in the Gospels has lost the freshness of its beauty and no longer vividly impresses us, let us go out into the fair world of Nature. There Christ will come to us in another, perchance a more effectual, form. And as we listen while Nature herself bears witness to his redeeming love and saving goodwill, we may haply learn that all He asks of us is that we let Him save us from our sins into life and peace everlasting.

## XIII.

## The Parable of the Unjust Steward.

ST. LUKE xvi. 1—9.

“**H**IS lord commended the Unjust Steward ;” but did *our* Lord ?—a question to be asked. A question that has been and is still asked with no little anxiety. It is in this question, indeed, that the whole difficulty of the parable lies ; and to this, as to so many other questions, the answer is both Yes and No. Our Lord did, in some sense, commend the Unjust Steward, for He holds him up for our imitation ; and yet He did not commend, but most emphatically condemns him. Let us dwell a little on this answer, and mark how our Lord blends commendation with condemnation in his comment on the parable, that we may thus be quit of the perplexity with which we sometimes read it.

The difficulty of the parable lies, as I have said, in this : that, by holding him up as an example, the Lord Jesus in some sort stamps the Unjust Steward with his approval. We know very well that He hates all wrong, all injustice ; and therefore it irks and pains us to conceive of Him as in any case approving, or even seeming to approve, injustice and wrong. Here lies our difficulty ; how is it to be met and removed ?

The difficulty is in large measure of our own making ; it springs from our want of breadth and largeness of heart. We suffer ourselves to be so taken up by one thought, or by

one line of thought, that for the time we forget the thoughts which would balance or correct it. For consider. If you were asked to point out what it is in our Lord's teaching which has most impressed your imagination and touched your heart, would you not say, "The simple exquisite parables which fell from his lips"? And again, if you were asked, "What is it that makes these parables so impressive and pathetic?" would not your answer be, "The fact that they incarnate spiritual truths and realities, clothe them with flesh and blood, shew them to us in men of like passions with ourselves, and thus, not only bring them to the level of our thoughts, but make them a thousandfold more attractive to us? They bring the divine life into the human life: that is what makes them so winning to us, so precious!" We all admit, we all feel, I think, that if the men, and women, and children were taken out of the parables, if instead of parables we had fables of talking beasts and birds, their charm would be quite gone.

But now, if our Lord was to put men into his parables, if this constitutes their special charm, will you be good enough to tell me where He was to find *perfect* men to put into them? Can you even tell me of what use, what comfort, they would have been to us, who are not perfect? You know very well, the moment the thought is suggested to you, that if our Lord would use men to set forth spiritual truths and relations, if He would hold up any man but Himself, He must take imperfect men. Even when their imperfections of character are not noted, as they often are, we know they were not perfect. The publican in the Temple, who smote on his breast and cried, "God be merciful to me, the sinner," or the son who said, "I go not," but afterwards repented, and went into his father's vineyard—these were by no means perfect men; nevertheless they may be very perfect types of humble and sincere contrition. And when no fault is

alleged, are we to assume that the men were faultless? Do you suppose that the servants who traded with their lord's talents, and made them more, were perfect men or perfect servants even; that they never lost an opportunity of traffic, or failed to turn it to the best account? Was Lazarus, the beggar, never fretful, impatient, envious, because at last he was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom? Was the character of any Samaritan, even that of the Good Samaritan, wholly without defect or stain? Yet these men are held up for our admiration, and command it. It is their several good qualities which we are to admire and imitate: and if the Unjust Steward has any good quality, why should we not admire and imitate that, despite his injustice, just as we admire the penitence of the Publican or of the Prodigal Son, despite the heinous faults which preceded their repentance?

When our Lord would teach us that God is our Father, and very ready to help us, He speaks to us of the fathers of our flesh. Have these, then, no infirmities, no faults, no imperfections? He at least thinks they have; for He says, "If ye, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father, not being evil, give the best gifts to them that ask Him!" And whenever He uses men to set forth God to us, or our duty to God, though He does not utter the words, we must supply the words, "If these, being evil, are yet so good, how much better must God be, or why cannot you be good too?" In the case before us, if we apply this rule, the argument runs, "If the Steward, being unjust, was yet so wise, so sagacious, be you also wise; shew the same thrift and sagacity for higher ends."

Perhaps, however, some may obscurely feel it as an objection, that the Unjust Steward is after all an exception to the common rule, since he fails in the very quality proper to his office. "It is required of stewards," above all things

else, "that they be faithful." *This* steward is unfaithful. Is it not at least a little curious and exceptional that an unfaithful steward, a man lacking the prime requisite of his position, should be placed before us for our imitation? It would be easy to reply,—Was not the prodigal son lacking in that filial reverence and affection which are proper to sons? Are not fathers often wanting in the love and generosity which are requisite in parents? Yet fathers and the prodigal are both set up for our imitation in the parables. But let us take more obvious and just instances, instances which run more closely parallel to that of the unfaithful Steward. What is the prime requisite of a judge? Is it not that he should be just? What is the prime requisite of a friend? Is it not that he should be kind and ready to help? Yet our Lord tells us one parable of an unjust judge who only avenged a widow because she wearied him with her importunity; and another parable of an unkind indolent friend who, when his neighbour came to him at midnight, would not be at the trouble of leaving his warm bed to rise and serve him. He uses the unjust judge and the unkind friend as types of God, the perfect Judge, the perfect Friend. Why, then, may He not use the unfaithful Steward as a type of good men? If God's love and kindness are to be brought home to us by the conduct of men so imperfect, men lacking the very first requisites of their several positions, why are we to scruple at learning our duty from an imperfect man, even though he be a steward lacking that fidelity which is the first requisite of his place?

The simple fact is, that in all these cases, as in most of the parables, men are employed to set forth and illustrate some single point; the good qualities in them, or the good actions they do, despite their bad qualities, are detached from their characters and lives, that we may admire these,

and imitate them, and possess ourselves of them. And on any other terms human speech would be well-nigh impossible. If we were to wait for perfect men, men perfect in all parts and on all sides of their character, before admiring them or asking others to admire them, *whom* should we admire? what models or examples could we hold up before our children or our neighbours? Instead of turning so foolishly from the instruction human life offers us, we detach this quality or that from the character of men, and admire that, without for a moment meaning to set up all the man was or did as a complete model, an exact and full epitome of human excellence. We can call the attention of our children to the dexterity of a cricketer or a juggler without supposing, or being supposed, to make him the *beau ideal* of mental and moral character. We can admire Lord Bacon as one of "the greatest" and "wisest" of mankind, if we also admit him to have been one of "the meanest." We can quote an eminent sceptic as a very model of patience and candour, yet deplore his scepticism. Both we and the Bible can detach noble qualities from the baser matter with which they are blended, and say, "Imitate these men in what was noble, pure, lovely," without being supposed to add, "and imitate them also in what was mean, weak, immoral." Why, then, should we deny our Lord the liberty we claim for ourselves? What should we expect of Him but the mode of teaching which pervades the Bible throughout? Above all, why should we suppose Him to approve what is evil in the men He puts before us, unless He expressly warns us against it, when we ourselves, and the inspired writers, seldom make any such provision against misconception? Read the parable honestly, and, according to all the analogies of human and inspired speech, you will expect to find some excellent quality in the Steward which you will do

well to imitate ; but you will not for an instant suppose that it is his evil qualities which you are to approve.

Do any ask, "What was this excellent quality?" Mark what it is, and what alone it is, that even his lord commends in the Unjust Steward. It is not his injustice, but his prudence. "His lord commended him because he had done wisely"—because on a critical occasion he had acted with a certain promptitude and sagacity, because he had seen his end clearly and gone straight at it. Did he not deserve the praise?

He was steward, reeve, bailiff to an Oriental lord, or landlord. It was his duty to admit and dismiss tenants ; to value their land and its produce ; to fix, collect, and sell their rents ; for in the East, then as often, now, rents were paid not in money, but in kind. If an oliveyard yielded a thousand measures of oil annually, a certain proportion, say a tenth, was paid to the landlord : in that case, the rent was a hundred measures of oil. If a farm yielded a thousand bushels of wheat, the rent of course would be a hundred bushels of wheat. The steward had to fix the value of the crop, to see that the due proportion of it was paid as rent, to sell what produce was not needed for the supply of the household, and to pay in the cash he received for it. This steward had been unfaithful to his trust. We are not told that he was dishonest in the sense of making a purse for himself, or in deliberately undervaluing rents, or in taking bribes. We are simply told that he had "wasted" his master's goods. He had been negligent and luxurious. He had been wanting in vigilance, energy, self-denial, and so had fallen into that most common of all dishonesties which, because it breaks into no man's house and steals no man's purse, has no notion that it is dishonest.

At last the Steward wakes up from his long lazy dream. Ruin stares him in the face. He is no longer to be steward.

Is it not creditable to the man, does it not prove that there must have been good stuff in him, that even this sudden catastrophe does not overwhelm him ; that he can take it coolly ; that he can look facts in the face ? His eyes are clear, his nerves unshaken. He takes it for granted that the stewardship is gone ; and, basing himself on that assumption, asks himself, “ What shall I do ? ”

At first only one alternative presents itself—dig or beg : he may honourably earn his bread by labour, or, with sudden abasement, he may beg it from door to door. This alternative he at once rejects. He concludes, “ I cannot dig ; to beg I am ashamed.” Luxury had unfitted him for toil ; alms would choke his pride. Once more he is brought to a pause ; and the question recurs, “ What shall I do ? ”

At last he cries, “ I have it ; I know, I am resolved what to do. I will make the tenants my friends. I have not been hard on them ; they are well enough disposed towards me : I will bind them to me with ties of self-interest ; and then, instead of letting me beg at their doors, they will receive me into their houses.”

So he calls his lord’s debtors to him—the tenants whose rent was not yet paid, though it was due, and asks, “ How much do you owe ? and how much you ? A hundred measures of oil ? Let us put it down at fifty. A hundred measures of wheat ? Wheat is of more value than oil ; it will not be safe to take off so much ; but put it down at eighty.”

Now mark the audacity, yet ability, of the fraud. The Steward had hitherto, through mere laziness and wasteful luxury perhaps, paid the landlord less than the estate produced. He has now to send in his accounts and vouchers, and run the risk of having his malversation exposed. But by falsifying his accounts, by lowering the rents, he keeps the revenue of the estate at the same low mark, and has at least a chance of persuading his master that the estate was

never worth more, and staving off the worst risks of detection. On the other hand, these "bills" or documents which he handed to the tenants, and which would be at least the basis of any future estimate of rents, would, perhaps for years, secure them a considerable saving, and incline them to deal generously with him. By accepting his fraudulent valuations, too, they became parties to the fraud—came into the same boat with him; henceforth, if their generosity failed, he had them in his power. So that, by one stroke, he did much both to conceal his former delinquencies, and to secure a provision for his future necessities.

The fraud is detected and exposed; but the very man who would have suffered by it admires the politic contrivance, the sagacity, capacity, and forethought of his discarded servant. Is it so untrue to nature that a man of the world should admire cleverness of that sort? Go to the board-room of certain English societies and companies for your answer, or to the Gold Exchange of New York. Do we not all know of brokers and directors who have a profound admiration for the clever frauds their agents or subordinates palm on the public? Have we not all heard men, honest men, dwell with a certain relish on the cleverness of a swindle, and even of a swindle by which they themselves have suffered? Our Lord is describing human nature such as it is, such as it was centuries ago in the East, where honesty in public affairs was almost unknown; and where a shrewd cunning fellow like this Steward, a man full of subtle expedients even in the hour of exposure, would be held in almost as high esteem as he would be now on the Stock Exchange or the Gold Exchange.

*His* lord commends him, then, as was very natural; but does *our* Lord? Let us see. When He has told this story taken straight from human life, the Lord Jesus begins to comment on it—to apply it, and to limit its application, to

point the moral which He intended the tale to adorn. What does He say? He says, "*The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light.*" The landlord in the parable commended the Steward's wisdom; and our Lord, without precisely commending it, fixes on this very wisdom as the notable thing in him, as that which He would have us imitate.

"The children of this world are wiser than the children of light." That is to say, worldly men shew a superior sagacity and earnestness in pursuing their aims to religious men in the pursuit of their aims. They see their end more clearly, adapt their means to that end more skilfully, handle them more vigorously. They are more politic, more contriving, more patient and indomitable in their endeavour to make a business or a fortune than we are to gain the knowledge of God or to win an eternal blessedness. They aim lower, but they aim better. They work harder, though they are not so well paid. They do more to obtain a corruptible crown than we to obtain the crown that fadeth not away. This Christ approves in them, this wise foresight, this skilful adaptation of means to ends, this capable and resolute handling of them.

Yet that we may not mistake Him, that we may not sink into an immoral admiration of mere cleverness, our Lord is careful to limit the application of his parable. The children of this world are wise; they are prudent, prescient, forecasting; they will deny themselves to-day to reach a greater good to-morrow. And we should shew a similar wisdom in our pursuit of the heavenly treasure. But their wisdom is far from being perfect. We must be careful how we admire it. They are only wise "*in their generation*;" when that is past, their wisdom will often prove to have been a folly. They may have made a fortune, but they cannot take it with them when they die. They may have carefully prepared

“houses” for themselves so long as they live on earth, but they have prepared for themselves no habitation when heart and flesh fail them. Their wisdom is only a wisdom for this world. Measure their conduct on the scale of their own generation, and you say, “These are capable sagacious men :” but measure it on the scale of eternity, that is, on the scale of their whole life, remember that they have to live beyond their generation, after this world has passed away, and you add, “What fools and blind they are after all !” Their thoughts and their gains perish with them. Immortal, destined to live for ever, they limit their foresight to a few years, and make absolutely no preparation for the eternity which lies beyond ; nay, they often unfit themselves for the eternal life by their very devotion to the business of the life they now live in the flesh.

So that, even while our Lord commends the wisdom of the Unjust Steward, He also condemns it. He would have us possess ourselves of it indeed ; but He would also have us use it for higher ends, on a larger scale, to secure a heavenly and immortal wealth. He puts an imperfect man before us, since perfect men were not to be had ; but it is only for the sake of the one good quality he possessed : and even this one quality, so imperfect and limited in him, is to become perfect and complete in us.

Nor even yet have we heard all that the Lord Jesus has to say about the meaning of this parable. That we might not mistake his intention He Himself draws out the moral of the story He had told. And if, instead of drawing our own hasty moral, and asking, “Are we, then, to be cunning and fraudulent as the Unjust Steward ?” we had listened to our Lord’s moral and let Him be his own interpreter, we should hardly have felt the perplexity with which we sometimes read the parable, He makes it plain enough what lesson we are to learn from it. His moral is—“And I say unto you,

Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations," literally, "into the eternal tabernacles." Could any moral flow more easily, more naturally, from the story? The Steward had made friends to himself out of his master's goods, *i.e.* by a wise or cunning use of them, that, when he no longer managed the estate, when that failed him, he might be received into the tenants' houses. "That," said Christ, "is what I would have you do, what I have told the story for,—that, out of your Master's goods, you may make to yourselves friends who, when ye fail, may receive you into the eternal tabernacles. Do for the heavenly home and the eternal state what the Steward did in time and for an earthly home."

Are we, then, to cheat our Master, to rob God, in order that we may be imitators of the Steward and learn the lesson of the parable? Nay; for we can only make friends in the eternal world out of the goods of time as we leave off cheating our Master, as we cease to rob God. It is not the fraudulent craft, nor the cool impudent dexterity of the man, whom our Lord Himself brands as the *unjust* Steward—it is not these which we are to imitate and admire. It is his foresight and sagacious provision for an evil day. We are to foresee, we are to provide for the evil day, the day when heart and flesh will fail us, by a wise use of the mammon of unrighteousness.

What is this mammon? and how may we make friends of it, friends in eternity? Mammon is the Syrian name for wealth, for the god of wealth. And wealth becomes "unrighteous" directly we make a mammon, a god of it. Is all wealth, then, all property, a mammon of unrighteousness? Not necessarily: though few thoughts are sadder than this,—that we can hardly take a single coin into our hands which has not been used for an unfair or immoral purpose,

or own a piece of land which has not at some time been polluted with fraud or legal chicanery. We, however, may hold our property by clear moral as well as by clear legal right. The little we have may have been gained by honest toil. It may be no mammon to us, although it has been a most unrighteous mammon to others. Yet none the less we may make an idol of it. If at any moment we love it more than truth or honesty, or if we simply set our hearts on it as the supreme good,—the very moment it stands first with us, it becomes to us a mammon of unrighteousness. For it has no right to the first place: nor can it satisfy as our supreme good should satisfy us. God has made us for Himself. And *we can know no rest till our supreme good—that which we love and prize most—is as immortal as ourselves.* God claims to stand first with us. To put wealth first is to have another God before Him, and so to miss our rest; since mere wealth cannot satisfy us even here, cannot comfort us in many of our afflictions, our losses, disappointments, bereavements, and has no power beyond the grave.

Yet we are constantly tempted, like the Unjust Steward, to put wealth first, to care for it more than for integrity and duty; to seek before all things some earthly possession in which we may dwell. Our Lord points us to a more excellent use of wealth. So far from approving the dishonest craft of the Steward, He condemns the very aim he set before him. He worshipped mammon, for he loved and served wealth more than God and his duty to God. “Do not you do that,” says Christ; “but, instead of making wealth an idol, make friends out of this idol in the eternal world. Put the wealth, which men lift out of its place, back into its place. So use the gifts and possessions of time as to prepare yourselves for eternity. Never, to spare your wealth or to get wealth, sacrifice your truth and uprightness. Nay, do not

even care so much for its temporal uses and conveniences, or for the personal good you may get out of it, as for the good you may do others with it. Employ it for ends which stretch beyond the years of time. Give to the poor; help the struggling; serve the Church: that so, when you have to leave all you possess in this world, you may find friends in the other world—good deeds and kindly services which have gone before you, and which will be your joy and reward for ever.”

That is the true moral of the parable; for it is our Lord's moral. Is it not a good and wholesome moral? Does it favour craft, fraud, cunning, employed for earthly ends? It is a whole heaven above any thought so base. It does not teach us to seek temporal comfort cunningly; it teaches us not to care too much for the temporal goods we have, to seek the eternal good wisely and with all our hearts, to value spiritual realities above all the goods of time. It brands the Unjust Steward as an idolator, a worshipper of the mammon of unrighteousness; and it incites us to seek first, far before all earthly aims, the righteousness and kingdom of God. It teaches us the true use of wealth, not a politic and strenuous pursuit of wealth. As we reflect on its moral, and ask ourselves, “What shall we do? how shall we make to ourselves friends of the unrighteous mammon?” we remember Zaccheus, who habitually gave the half of his goods to the poor; we remember the poor widow who threw into the treasury the two mites which were her whole living: we remember both those who have used large wealth for the good of men rather than for their own selfish enjoyment, and those who, that they might serve God better, have put from them all chances of wealth, all cravings for it, and out of their poverty have made many rich. “These,” we say, “these are they who have made to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; and, when they died, they were received into the eternal tabernacles.”

Let us be followers of them. Let us so live in the present as to provide for the future ; that, feeling secure as to the future, we may have peace in the present life. Whatever we have, let us use it for God and man, that we may raise up to ourselves friends beyond the reach of change and time.

If any object, "After all, then, the parable only invites us to an enlightened selfishness, only urges us to deny ourselves a present enjoyment in order that we may secure a larger good in the future !" I can only say that the Gospel does at times appeal to our self-love, which self-love, as it is necessary to our being and our well-being, can hardly be altogether an evil. But if our self-love be used as an argument for love to God and man, as I admit it is in the parable before us, all I can say is, It could very hardly be put to a better use.

## XIV.

## Making Friends of Mammon.

ST. LUKE xvi. 9.

**E**VEN if we are honest and devout, and "our open eyes desire the truth," it is still very difficult for us to ascertain exactly what value we ought to put on money, what influence we should allow it to exert on our aims, our habits, our desires. It does not, indeed, take much wisdom to see that the love of money for its own sake is simply base, that it is fatally injurious and degrading to the heart that harbours it; nor does it take an heroic goodness to determine that, come what may, we will not let the pursuit of wealth be our supreme quest, that we will not take Mammon for our god. But, then, very few of us do love money for its own sake; and, probably, most of us would refuse to deliberately sacrifice character and principle, or even culture and enjoyment, to the mere acquisition of wealth. Yet, none the less, if, taking the New Testament for our guide, we honestly try to determine with any precision what place money, and the pursuit of money, should take in our thoughts, our endeavours, our aims, we may haply find ourselves involved in no little perplexity.

Nor shall we find our perplexity relieved, we may rather find it deepened, as we study the teaching of Christ and his apostles on this theme, for they lay down principles against which we may find much to object. Look, for instance, at

what are probably their fullest utterances on it—1 Timothy vi. and Luke xvi.

In his Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul affirms that godliness with contentment is the true gain; that then only are we rich when we want nothing and long for nothing we do not possess, when our souls are settled in a sacred content undisturbed by lusts and cravings for aught beyond our reach. The love of money, he affirms, is a root from which all forms of evil spring. Impelled by this base lust, many have wandered from the Faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. The desire to be rich is a snare in which many feet have been caught; those who cherish it plunge into many foolish and hurtful lusts, and are drowned in perdition. The man of God will flee this love, this craving, this desire. Having food and raiment, he will therewith be content. Discarding the pursuit of riches, he will follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. He knows that as he brought nothing into the world, so neither can he carry anything out; why, then, should he neglect that in himself which is spiritual and eternal, in order to amass a burden which is only too likely to make his very life anxious and painful to him, and of which death will very certainly unlade him? The gains that *can* be carried into the next world, these, and these alone, should engage the heart of immortal man. In short, he speaks of wealth and of those who pursue it with a large tone of contempt and moral reproof which is really very surprising and perplexing to our English ears. For most of us frankly acknowledge that we should like to be rich, or at least somewhat richer than we are; some of us because we crave the ease, the enjoyment, the security, the social position and influence which wealth confers, and others of us because we crave, or persuade ourselves that we crave, the leisure for

culture, the refined habits and pursuits, the means and opportunities of doing good which are at present beyond our reach. "Content with bare food and *covering*, as St. Paul contemptuously calls it? Not we! We want well-appointed houses, well-served tables, and garments cut in the fashion of the time. We want books, music, pictures, and leisure to enjoy them. We want to mix with the best people on equal terms, to give our children the best education and training, to feel safe for the future, to provide against rainy days and sick days, days of infirmity and age."

Are such aims and desires wrong? St. Paul seems to think them wrong, at least when they stand *first* with us. Does Christ also think them wrong? Yes, Christ too, if at least we let them stand first. In this sixteenth chapter of Luke He expressly affirms that, so soon as wealth takes the *first* place in our thoughts, it takes a place to which it has no right; it becomes a God to us, a Mammon of unrighteousness. *He*, also, speaks of wealth with a certain tone of contempt. In this Chapter He puts three rich men, or comparatively rich men, before us, and one man so poor that he is a beggar, a famishing and unsuccessful beggar; and all the rich men are rogues or fools, only the poor man seeks righteousness and wins heaven. There is the steward who cheats his lord, and the lord who admires the very cunning that defrauds him; and there is Dives who, clothed in purple and fine linen, fares sumptuously every day, and yet comes to lack a cup of cold water at the last. The only good man in the Chapter, the only man who conducts his life to a good and happy close, is Lazarus, whose ulcerated body is starved for want of the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. *This* surely is a very melancholy and depressing picture of human life, and looks like a bitter satire on the aims we most of us pursue.

But if we are sincerely bent on making our lives right and

true, it is not satire that we want, but guidance, teaching, help. And if we ask: What principles do the Lord Jesus and St. Paul lay down by which we may conduct our lives, what principles that we can really reduce to practice? I think we may find three valuable principles in the Scriptures at which we have glanced.

The first is, that, whatever the end for which we desire it, we are never to let wealth stand first with us, never to make the acquisition of it our supreme aim, since *that* is to make a god of it, and to worship Mammon instead of the only true and wise God.

The second is, that, having food and clothing, having secured the bare necessities of physical life, we ought to be therewith content, and thereafter to devote our main energies to the cultivation of the moral life, of those spiritual graces — righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness—which are the best gain even for this world, and which we can carry out of this world into that which is to come.

The third is, that, whatever we have, or may gain, we should use it all for noble and spiritual ends—make ourselves *friends* out of it,—friends that will be a constant refuge and resource to us whatever we may lose or acquire.

These three principles may cut our prejudices against the grain, they may rebuke our conduct, they may condemn our aims; but I do not see how, with the words of the Master and of the greatest of his Apostles before us, we are to deny that they are Christian principles. I think we must all admit that the man who finds wealth pouring in upon him, who has tasted the pleasure it can give, and feels what power over his fellows it confers upon him, but who nevertheless risks or sacrifices it all, rather than do what his conscience condemns as wrong,—I think we must all cheerfully admit that such a man as this is a Christian; that he

is simply acting out a Christian principle, proving that he loves God more than Mammon; and that he sets us an example which we are bound to follow.

And, again, if another man, feeling very strongly that, to him, riches are a temptation and a snare, refuses to pursue them with much ardour; if, finding himself able to provide food and clothing by an amount of toil which does not exhaust his powers, he resolves to be content with the most modest provision for his outward wants, and to give much of his time and his main energy to the study of God's will and the service of his neighbour: if he thus seek to grow in righteousness and godliness, in faith and love, in meekness and patience—I think we shall all feel that he too has set a Christian aim before him, that he is animated by Christian principle, and that he is even more worthy of our approval and imitation than the man who simply refuses to do a wrong that he may gain by it.

And, once more, if a third man finds himself wise enough and strong enough to get his moral and spiritual culture, his growth in godliness, in the very use and pursuit of wealth itself; if, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, he gains riches without undue effort and care, and then makes it all his care and his constant effort to use his riches for the glory of God and the good of man,—here, again, we must surely admit that we have a Christian, and a Christian of the highest stamp, before us, in whose steps it will be our wisdom to tread.

*That wealth should never stand first with us; that it should never be indispensable to us; that we should value it only for the good uses to which we can put it*—these are the three great principles we have found in the New Testament; and these are not only Christian principles, they are also principles that commend themselves to every man's reason and conscience in the sight of God. And therefore we shall be

condemned by reason and conscience, as well as by Christ, if gain is more to us than godliness; if we dread poverty more than we dread sin, or sorrow more over a bad debt than over a bad action, over a loss of money than over a loss of temper; or if we do not seek to make a wise and generous use of our money, rather than to secure a selfish enjoyment of it.

But here the question naturally arises, What *is* the wise, what is the Christian use of money? *i.e.*, what should be our ruling principle and motive both in acquiring and spending it, however much or however little we may possess? And to this question we can have no other answer than that of our Lord, if only we understand it rightly: "*Make to yourselves friends out of Mammon, that, when it shall fail you, they may receive you into the everlasting tabernacles.*" But it does not help us much to a right understanding of this answer to be told that *Mammon* is a Syriac word for "wealth," and that it is out of this wealth that we are to elicit friends more enduring and more hospitable than itself. To get on the true line of meaning we must remember that in these words our Lord gives the moral of a Parable, that of the Unjust Steward, which He had just uttered. This Steward, while the rents of the estate were under his control, so used them as to gain the favour of the tenants, in order that, when he lost his place, they might receive him into their houses. Our Lord points the moral of the story by bidding us be equally prudent and forecasting. He would have us so use our goods and possessions as that, when these fail us, by our wise kind use of them, we may have made friends who shall welcome us into everlasting habitations, and be our crown and joy for ever.

This is, obviously, the general thought contained in these words. It is in this sense that we all read them, and rightly

read them, if only we understand it rightly. But do we understand it rightly? Probably most of us understand that we are to do what good we can with our "goods" now, in order that *when we die* we may receive the reward of our good deeds. But that is a very partial and imperfect reading of the words. It is true that our Lord promises us an *eternal* reward: but "eternity" is a word that covers the present and the past as well as the future. It is true He promises that, if we make friends of Mammon, then, when Mammon fails us, our "friends will receive us; and it is also true that Mammon will fail us when we die, for it is very certain that we cannot carry it out of the world with us, even in the portable form of a cheque-book. But may not Mammon fail us *before* we die? May we not, even while we are in this life, lose our money, or find that there are other losses for which no money can compensate us? We know very well that we may, some of us know it only too sadly. Riches have wings *for use*, and not only for show. It is not only the grim face of Death that scares them to flight; they flee before a thousand other alarms. The changes and accidents in which they *fail* us are innumerable; there are countless wounds which gold will not heal, endless cravings which it will not satisfy. And the very point and gist and value of our Lord's promise is that, *whenever* Mammon fails us, *in life* and its changes and sorrows no less than in death, if we have previously made friends out of it, these friends will open eternal tabernacles in which our stricken spirits may find refuge and consolation. It is this present, this constant, this eternal reward of a wise use of our temporal possessions on which we need most of all to fix our thoughts.

And, remember, we *all* need it, the poor no less than the rich. For we all have some acquaintance with Mammon, though for some of us, happily, it is a very distant acquaint-

ance. We all have a little money, or money's worth, at our control, and may take one of two courses. We may either crave more money so ardently as to pursue it unremittingly, and to subordinate all other aims to this aim; or, while candidly recognizing its worth for certain purposes, and trying to get as much of it as we need, we may resolve that it shall never be our master, that we will not give our whole life, or the best part of our life, to its service, that we will keep other and higher aims constantly before us.

Well, now, suppose a man has lived long enough to feel his feet and to consider the courses that are open to him, and to be sincerely anxious to take the right course and to make the best use he can of his life. All around him he sees neighbours who are pushing on with the utmost eagerness in the pursuit of fortune, who are sacrificing ease, culture, pleasure, health, and at times conscience itself, in their love for that which St. Paul pronounces to be a root of all evil, a temptation and a snare, and which Christ says makes it very hard for a man to enter the kingdom of God. He has to determine whether or not he will join in this headlong pursuit,—whether he, too, will risk health of body, culture of mind, and sensitive purity of conscience, in the endeavour to grow rich, or richer than he is. He sees that the dignity and comfort and peace of human life depend largely on his being able to supply a large circle of wants, without constant anxiety and care; but he also feels that he has many wants, and these the deepest, which mere wealth will not supply. Accordingly, he resolves to work diligently and as wisely as he can, in order to secure an adequate provision for his physical necessities, and to guard his independence; but he resolves also that he will not sacrifice himself, or all that is best and purest and most refined in himself, to the pursuit of money and what it will fetch. Hence, so far as he can, he limits his wants; he

keeps his tastes simple and pure ; and by labours that do not absorb his whole time and energies he provides for the due gratification of these tastes and wants. Hence also he gives a good deal of his time and energy to reading good books, let us say, or to mastering some natural science, or to developing a taste for music and acquiring skill in it. He expects his neighbour, who had no better start nor opportunities than he, to grow far richer than he himself has done, if his neighbour think only of getting and investing money. And therefore he does not grudge him his greater wealth, nor look on it with an envious eye ; he rather rejoices that he himself has given up some wealth in order to acquire a higher culture, and to develop his literary or artistic tastes.

Here, then, we have two men, two neighbours, before us. The one has grown very rich, has far more money than he can enjoy, more even perhaps than he quite knows how to spend or invest, but he has hardly anything except what his money will procure for him. The other has only a modest provision for his wants, but he has a mind stored with the best thoughts of ancient and modern wisdom, an eye which finds a thousand miracles of beauty in every scene of Nature, and an ear that trembles under the ecstasy of sweet harmonious sounds. By some sudden turn of fortune, Mammon fails them both ; they are both reduced to poverty : both, so soon as they recover from the shock, have to make a fresh start in life. Which of the two is better off now ? Which of them has made real friends to himself out of the Mammon while he had it ? Not the wealthier of the two assuredly ; for, now that he has lost his wealth, he has lost all that he had : he has lived only to get rich ; when his riches went, all went. But the other man, the man who read and thought and cultivated his mental faculties, *he* has not lost all. His money has gone, but it has not taken from him the wise thoughts he had gathered from books, or his

insight into the secrets and beauties of Nature, or the power to charm from the concord of sweet sounds. He is simply thrown more absolutely on these inward and inseparable possessions for occupation and enjoyment. While he had it he made friends to himself out of the Mammon of unrighteousness; and, now that it has failed him, those friends receive him into tabernacles which are always open, and in which he has long learned to find pleasure and to take rest.

Poor and imperfect as this illustration is, for there are losses in which even Science and Art, even Nature and Culture, can give us but cold comfort—it may nevertheless suffice to make our Lord's words clear. For, obviously, if a man give a good part of the time he might devote to the acquisition of wealth to *religious* culture, instead of to merely mental culture; if he take thought and spend time in acquiring habits of prayer and worship and obedience and trust, in acquainting himself with the will of God and doing it;—if he expend money, and time which is worth money to him, in helping on the work of the Church and in ministering to the wants of the sorrowful and guilty,—he, too, has made to himself friends out of the Mammon of unrighteousness, and friends that will not fail him when Mammon fails him, but will receive him into tabernacles of rest. However poor he may be, he can still pray, and read his Bible, and put his trust in God, and urge the guilty to penitence, and speak comfort to the sorrowful; and, by his cheerful content and unswerving confidence in the Divine goodness, he may now bear witness, with an eloquence far beyond that of mere words, to the reality and grandeur of a truly religious life. Faith, hope, charity, righteousness and godliness, patience and meekness, will not close their doors against him, because Mammon has slammed *his* door in his face. *These* are eternal friends, who pitch their tabernacles beside us wherever our path may lead, and who welcome us to the

rest and shelter they afford all the more heartily because we have not where to lay our head.

In fine, it is not simply a future reward which Christ promises to as many as make a wise use of money and money's worth, but a present, a constant, an eternal reward. Virtually He says to us, "Use your money for wise ends, whether you have little of it or much ; make it your servant rather than your master ; compel it to minister to your spiritual as well as to your temporal wants ; expend thought and time and labour in the effort to become wise and good and kind : and then, whenever Mammon fails you, your wisdom and goodness and kindness will abide with you ; and these will fit you, far more than any wealth, for a noble and happy life whether in this world or in that which is to come."

## XV.

## The Conversion of Nathanael.

ST. JOHN i. 45—51.

WE have good reason to believe that Nathanael was an apostle,\* one of the twelve whom Jesus chose to be always with Him; and yet only one incident in his life is recorded for our instruction. Happily, that incident is one of the most momentous and instructive. It is nothing less than the story of his conversion to the faith of Christ. And surely no event in any man's life is of graver moment than this. When we desire to form a judgment on any man's character, what most of all we desire to know is the history of the turning-point in his career, of the great critical moment which, for good or evil, made him what he was. It is at such a moment that we see Nathanael in the glass of the Word. The main course of his life, the labours, trials, and joys of his apostleship, are veiled from us, save that we know he must have shared in the experiences common to the Twelve. But the veil is lifted for us at the very crisis of his career, at the moment in which he became a servant and friend of Christ's.

To this sacred and impressive moment, then, let us bend our thoughts, considering (1) the Doubt of Nathanael, and how it was met; (2) the Confession of Nathanael, and how

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\* His full name was, probably, Nathanael Bar-tholomew; *i.e.* Nathanael, the son of Tolmai.

it was won; and (3) the Promise of Nathanael, and what it meant.

(1) *The Doubt of Nathanael and how it was met.*—"Philip"—who seems to have been a neighbour and an intimate companion of Nathanael's, and who himself had but just recognized in Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God—"findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." To this joyful and excited exclamation Nathanael demurs, asking doubtfully of his neighbour, "Can *any* good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip meets his doubt with the simple and confident invitation, "Come and see;" Jesus meets it by exclaiming as Nathanael drew near to him, "Behold an Israelite indeed"—a genuine son of Israel, the prince with God, out of whom guile had to be so long and painfully chastized—"in whom there is no guile!"

Now if we would appreciate Nathanael's doubt, we must remember that all the Galileans were held in contempt by the Pharisees of Jerusalem, and that not altogether without cause. The province of Galilee was, practically, much farther from Jerusalem than the Highlands of Scotland are from London, although not half nor quarter so many miles lay between the two. And, to reach the metropolis, the Galileans had either to traverse the alien district of Samaria, or to risk a somewhat perilous journey across the highlands and valleys on the other side of the Jordan. Hence many of them habitually absented themselves from the annual services and feasts of the Temple. To these every Jew was bound, by the law of Moses, to go up thrice every year. Those who failed to "present themselves before the Lord" were held by the punctilious Pharisees and scribes to be little better than heathen.

The Galileans, moreover, engaged in commerce with their Gentile neighbours, and especially with the wealthy merchants of Tyre and Sidon. Their commercial intercourse with heathen races had abated the edge and strictness of their ceremonialism, and, still worse, had also chilled the fervour of their piety. And here was another reason for holding them in contempt. Even the prophets described the Galileans as a "people that sat in darkness;" and the Pharisees, instead of carrying them "a great light," were much more disposed to consign them to "Gehenna."

Metropolitans generally have a little contempt at the service of provincials. Even the most religious men do not always feel more pity than anger for the irreligious. So that we can easily understand how, in the Hebrew metropolis, the provincials of Galilee were thought to be little better than outcasts, half heathenized by contact with the heathen, and how the Pharisees came to be very sure that "out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

Even in a community of social or religious outcasts, however, class or caste distinctions are generally found—"in every deep a lower still." Commonly there are some hapless creatures on whom their fellows expend the contempt they receive from society at large. And thus the despised Galileans treated the inhabitants of Nazareth. What *they* were to the Jews of Jerusalem, that the Nazarenes were to them. Themselves despised and contemned, they took their revenge, not on those who despised them, but, as the manner of men is, on those who were weaker, if not worse, than themselves. Even the guileless Nathanael, who lived within a two hours' walk of Nazareth, was not free from this miserable prejudice. When Philip declared that he had found the Messiah in a Nazarene, Nathanael gravely doubted whether any good thing *could* come out of a village of such ill-repute.

This prejudice was probably strengthened by other feelings, quite as hard to overcome as the set and flow of public opinion. One of the saddest effects of contempt is that it often makes men contemptible. To hold and shew a low opinion of men, is only too likely to reduce them to the level you assign them; while if you think well of them, if you let them see that you hope much from them, they will often grow "to match the promise in your eyes." Our vulgar proverb, "Give a dog a bad name, and hang him," goes on the assumption that, *if* you give a dog a bad name, it will not be long before he deserves the halter. And the Nazarenes, despised by others, learned to despise themselves, just as the publicans, finding it in vain to struggle against *their* bad name, sank, for the most part, into open and shameless "sinners."

Then, too, there was the prejudice more than once adverted to by our Lord Himself—"A prophet is not without honour, *save in his own country, and among his own kin.*" Men hardly ever expect much of their immediate neighbours. If by any chance a family, or village, happen to produce a genius, almost every one will recognize his claim before *they* can see anything remarkable in him.

The doubt of Nathanael had, we perceive, a broader basis than most doubts have. The general contempt for Nazareth, the self-distrust of the Galilean, the prejudice of close neighbourhood, all made it hard for him to see the Christ of God in a Nazarene. And it is, perhaps, significant of his guileless candour that he expresses his doubt, not in the form of a dogmatic assertion, but in that of a question: "*Can* any good thing come out of Nazareth? Can any living, life-giving root spring out of *that* dry ground? Jesus, the son of Joseph our neighbour, a Galilean, a Nazarene—*this* He of whom Moses and the prophets wrote! That were a wonder past all telling." His doubt does not amount to

denial ; it is rather expressive of a hope darkened and restrained by a cautious fear of mistake.

Philip meets this doubt very wisely. He appeals to experience, and invites trial. He says simply, "Come and see." No doubt he recognized in Nathanael a mood with which he himself was familiar : for Philip also seems, by nature, to have been "slow of heart to believe." He had had his doubts, his prejudices, his fears ; and probably he and his neighbour, Nathanael, had often sat under the fig-tree at Cana, talking sadly, and a little sceptically, over the affairs of the Jewish Church and State. Only in the light of one Presence had his prejudices vanished ; only by the sound of one Voice had his doubts been charmed to rest. If he could bring Nathanael to that Presence, and within the sound of that Voice, he had no fear of the result.

This was his only resource ; and this is *our* only resource. Nothing but a personal experience of the grace of Christ—no array of arguments and proofs—nothing but a personal and vital contact with Him who is "the truth and the life," will quicken us into newness of life, or redeem us from the thralldom of fear and doubt. We must "come and see" the fair thing, "the good thing" which has come out of Nazareth, before we shall rise into the rest of faith.

Nathanael shewed himself to be without guile in that he did "come and see." Neither his prejudices, nor even his open avowal of them, were permitted to hold him back. And now a greater than Philip takes him in hand. The Nazarene requites him good for evil ; He meets with love and admiration the man who had suspected Him, who *was* suspecting Him : "Behold a genuine Israelite, in whom is no guile !" How tender the rebuke ! While Nathanael had been doubting Jesus, Jesus had been watching him with benign approval, and greets him, now that he comes, with hearty commendation, although he comes in a questioning and most questionable mood.

We are not to think of our Lord's greeting, however, as a mere compliment; the encomium He pronounced was not undeserved. He who was "the truth" spake only the truth. Nathanael must have been a genuine and guileless Israelite, or he would not have been saluted as "an Israelite indeed." The reference of the greeting is, doubtless, to Jacob's later and better name. When his guile was chastened out of him, Jacob, the subtle supplanter, became Israel, the wrestler and prince with God. From the emphasis laid on the epithet "Israelite," we may reasonably infer that Nathanael had been wont to wrestle with God in prayer; that in the strife of prayer he had won his guileless simplicity, his frank sincerity of soul. In much he might be still ignorant and weak, tinged by the prejudices of his race; but *duplicity* was no longer among his faults. He was untainted by the fatal plague-spot of his generation; he was no hypocrite, but a sincere and genuine man. He rang true. He looked at all things, or was at least disposed to look at them, through his own eyes, not through the coloured glasses of tradition, and to speak of them as he found them. Sincere men are often doubters for a while; sometimes for a long while. But in the very sincerity which leads them to doubt, and to avow their doubts, lies our hope of their recovery to faith and the rest of faith. Once set the very truth before their eyes, so that they can see it, and they forthwith with joy receive it.

Nathanael's frank sincerity came out, as in other things, so also in the artlessness with which he uttered his doubt, urged his question, and at last avowed his allegiance to Christ. And it was on this sincerity that Christ laid hold—proving his Divine wisdom by fastening on the grace which was rich in promise for the future, and not on the misgiving that sprang from the prejudices of the past. A less wise teacher would probably have set himself to *answer*

the doubt of Nathanael, instead of lauding his sincerity. He would have tried to argue it down, to shew from the prophets that the Messiah "*should* be called a Nazarene." And thus, while stopping the mouth of Nathanael, He might have utterly failed to win his heart. The Lord Jesus took a more excellent way. Prejudice is seldom overcome by logic; but it is often consumed in the fervours of strong and happy emotion. And Jesus kindles a fervent and happy emotion in the breast of the pious and guileless Israelite, by acknowledging his piety and his sincerity. Passing by the doubt which crept across the mere surface of his soul, the Lord fixed on the permanent underlying virtue of his character. He addressed Himself not to that which was but for a moment, but to that which was for all time, and for eternity; and by recognizing and admiring that which was best and most divine in Nathanael, He won an adoring recognition of that which was perfectly divine in Himself.

Now in this, as in all else, Christ has left us an example,—an example which we, alas! are slow to follow. He has taught us to admire the sincerity of the sceptic, when at least he is sincere. He has taught us to appeal to that which is best in those who doubt what we believe, to be forward in our recognition of it, to be prompt and hearty in our admiration of it, and thus to incline and predispose them to faith. Would that we had followed his example more closely, or were following it! *We* find it hard to admit that there *can* be any good thing in a man until he has joined the Christian fellowship, or even until he has joined our section of that fellowship. Till then, whatever charity we may profess, practically we too often suspect him of not being open to conviction or of not being faithful to it. *We* have but little admiration to bestow on such homespun virtues as sincerity and uprightness, if they are not found

in our communion; and even in that communion we are sometimes tempted to resent rather than to admire them. We demand creeds, conformity to our standards, rather than a wise simplicity and candour of mind, or a fearless integrity, or a life without guile. We are much more apt, it is to be feared, at espying the faults, even of those who do hold our creeds and conform to our standards, than in discovering and admiring their virtues. And if any dare to entertain a doubt, have we always even charity enough to bid them "Come and see" for themselves? Mainly because our own hold of truth is so slight and uncertain as that we are in some danger of relaxing our grasp at every shock, or because we are too indolent or too timid to look all round a doubt and to meet it fairly, we shriek out our foolish terror and alarm; and instead of extending a helping hand to the neighbour who is drawing back from Jesus, and from "the truth as it is in Jesus," we often hurl our hasty anathemas at him, and *drive* him from the sacred Presence which he is reluctant to leave.

I have somewhere read that when the moon is eclipsed the Chinese turn out with their drums and tomtoms, making the night hideous with their tumult, doing the most that mere noise can do to frighten away the evil spirit which, as they suppose, is devouring the queen of night. But I never heard that the evil spirit *was* frightened away, or that the eclipse was any the briefer, or that the eternal laws paused even for an instant in their march because of the din and clamour below. Nor is the spirit of doubt to be chased away by mere noise, whether of argument or of vituperation. We need not be disturbed and lose our rest because for a while shadows obscure the heavenly light. The moon is quite safe, and in God's good time will once more clearly reflect the lustre of the lord of day.

There is, indeed, a certain kind of doubt proceeding mainly

from an affectation of singularity or of superior thoughtfulness, which deserves no respect, and which *may* be best met by rebuke. But there are other kinds of doubt which should move us, not to rebuke, but to sympathy and compassion. It often happens, at a certain step of their mental development, that, in proportion to their power and sincerity of mind, men find it hard to acquiesce in the popular creed, hard even to accept and believe the very truth. They want a reason for faith. *They* see difficulties which are hidden from men of a less inquisitive and searching intellect. And they are too honest to profess a faith of which they are not assured, or to say that they see fully what they only see in part. And, again, it constantly happens that men, long habituated to certain modes of thought and action, conceive a prejudice in their favour, which makes it very hard for them to receive new views of truth, even when the new are also larger views. Like the men in our Lord's parable, they have got to love their old garments and their old wine; and they do not and cannot "straightway desire the new." All such doubts, all doubts that are sincere and natural, should be met with kindness and patience. Who that really knows the difficulty of arriving at truth can look without compassion on a neighbour struggling with the detaining bonds of habit and prejudice, and unable all at once to shake them off? Who that knows the rarity and the value of sincerity will not respect a neighbour the more because he will not palter with his conscience, and pretend to see what he cannot see, and to believe what he cannot believe? From Christ's treatment of Nathanael let us learn how to treat such doubters as these. Let us admire their fidelity to conviction, and so predispose them to think well of our convictions, and to listen with candour to the arguments we allege on their behalf. And to the end that we may deal patiently and kindly even with the doubts which are most offensive

to us, let us seek a more sincere and hearty faith in our own principles and convictions. For our impatience of doubt often springs from the fear lest we should be overcome by doubt; we grow angry because we are not sure of ourselves; we find it easier to ban and condemn than to give a reason, or a sufficient reason, for the faith that is in us.

(2) *The confession of Nathanael, and how it was won.*—“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” exclaimed Jesus, as, led by Philip, Nathanael drew near to Him. Nathanael responds to the gracious salutation with, “Whence knowest Thou me?” And Jesus replies, “Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee. Then follows the confession, “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel.”

In Nathanael's response to the salutation of our Lord we have a fine illustration of true, as distinguished from false, modesty. Jesus had greeted him, with wonder and delight, as a *guileless* Jacob, a genuine Israelite, as worthy therefore to receive the visions and gifts vouchsafed to his father Israel. And Nathanael does not disclaim the honour; he does not protest that he is unworthy of it. He feels, apparently, that the Rabbi of Nazareth has fairly summed up his spiritual history, that He has expressed his true character in a single phrase. And he does not, as surely false modesty would have done, pretend to put away the honour from him. He tacitly admits the truth of Christ's description. The only thing that puzzles him is how a stranger should know him so well. “Yes, Thou knowest me: but *whence* knowest Thou me?” And yet, on the other hand, there is a true and unfeigned modesty in this response. His words mean “Whence knowest thou one so little known, so inconspicuous, so obscure, as I am.” He has but a poor opinion of himself. He is conscious that he has lived a quiet, retired, and medi-

tative life, that he has not attracted the public eye, and has done nothing great enough to attract it; and it perplexes him to meet with One who seems to know him altogether. Moreover, it irks and a little frightens him, I think, to find his inward life laid bare, to stand in the presence of One from whom nothing seems to be hid. He feels that his secret has been read, and he shrinks back with a touch of fear from an inspection so searching; not because he has anything to hide, for he is without guile; but because it is as terrible to him to find himself utterly known by One whom he knows not as it would be to us. One can fancy his recoiling form, and catch the tone of alarm in his voice, as he looks on the Teacher who had read his every heart, and cries, "Whence knowest Thou me?"

To this admission and inquiry our Lord so replies as to deepen the impression He had already made. "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee." So, then, the eye of the Nazarene had been on him when Philip called him, and when, in answer to the call, he had doubted whether any good thing could come out of Nazareth. Nay, even *before* Philip called him, before he had so much as heard of this new Rabbi, the eye of Jesus had been upon him. With what deepening wonder must he have listened to such words as these!

What Nathanael had been doing when he was under the fig-tree, we cannot determine, we can only conjecture. But we know that the large and copious foliage of the fig-tree produces a profound shade; and that the Jewish rabbis were accustomed to rise early in the morning, and to seek the shelter of a fig-tree, in whose cool shade they might pray and study the law of God. And therefore we may reasonably infer that the devout Nathanael, on the morning on which he was brought to Christ, had risen betimes and sought the shade of his fig-tree, that he might hold com-

munion with God or meditate on his Word. It may be that here, hidden from the gaze of men, this genuine Israelite had wrestled with God in prayer, and had come forth from the divine conflict with a spirit more steadfastly sincere. Or it may be that, as he read the Word of promise, the great Hope of the time arose within his heart, that he passionately yearned for the advent of Messiah, and, like aged Simeon, received a promise that "he should not see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ." But whatever the scene that transpired under the solemn shadows of that leafy screen, it was evidently a secret which Nathanael knew to be hidden from every eye but that of God. The Rabbi of Nazareth no sooner hints that he is acquainted with it, no sooner intimates that he could the tale unfold "an if He would," than Nathanael feels that he is in the presence of a more than mortal power, in the presence of One who, like God, has "searched and seen him through." He no longer shrinks back; he bows before the Searcher of hearts, and witnesses the good confession, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel, and therefore *my* King, since Thou hast acknowledged me to be an Israelite indeed." He has "come," he has "seen," and he is "conquered." He no more debates about Galilee or Jerusalem, Bethlehem or Nazareth. Jesus may be "the son of Joseph;" but He must be "the Son of God." "Rabbi," he cries, "Thou art He whom I have long sought, with prayers and tears known only to Thee. Thou hast been with me, and I knew it not? Thou hast searched and known me. Thou hast compassed all my paths, and been acquainted with all my ways. And now *I* know *Thee*, who Thou art: Thou art the Son of God and the King of Israel. Henceforth I will have no King but Thee."

Obviously, Nathanael was moved to the very heart, and to the surrender of his heart; and even we, who are but

bystanders, can hardly look on unmoved. In Nathanael's example we find our duty; and in the wisdom and grace of Him who spake to Nathanael we find, or may find, a sufficient motive for the discharge of that duty. We, like the son of Tolmai, are bound to surrender ourselves to the Son of God, the King of men. And what will move us to this surrender if the gracious wisdom of Christ will not? From many of the stories related in the Gospels, notably from the story of St. Peter's call, we learn that, as He looked on men, Christ could read the innermost secret of their being, and forecast their future destiny; that, as He turned his glance on this man and that, their whole future shot out in long perspective before his eye, brightening ever toward the eternal day, or sinking toward the Hadean darkness. And now we learn that He, who could forecast the future of men, could also recall the past; that on every countenance on which He looked He could trace and interpret every line inscribed by experience, deciphering every enigma, solving every problem figured thereon by Time. Our present character, our past experience, our future destiny, all are naked and open to Him. Before Him the hidden things of darkness are as the secrecies of light. We cannot hide ourselves from Him under any tree in the garden, however dense its shade. He looks on us, and, lo! He knows us altogether, even to the purpose, passion, desire we most scrupulously conceal. Such wisdom would be dreadful to us were it not in the service of a love most tender and divine. We could not brook the inspection of his eye, were not his eye as quick to discern ought that is good in us as it was to discover the sincerity of Nathanael, were it not full of pity and love for us, even when, like Nathanael, we question his claim to rule over us. It is this blending of grace with authority which most of all moves and touches us, which constrains us to adopt the confession and prayer,

“Thou art God’s Son and our King. Thou knowest what we are. Oh, make us what we ought to be!”

(3) *The Promise to Nathanael, and what it meant.*—When Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” he was rewarded with the promise that he should be one of the rocks on which Christ would found his Church. And the similar confession of Nathanael wins a reward as exactly adapted to his character and desires as was the promise of Peter to his. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

This, then, is the promise. Because Nathanael has heard, he has believed. Because he believes, he is to see, and to see greater things than he has heard. He is to see the sacred reality of which his father Jacob’s dream was a shadow,—the Son of Man, taking the place of the “golden ladder,” and all the ministries of heaven passing to and fro upon, or through Him. And this promise is confirmed with an oath.

Here, for the first time, we hear that solemn *Ἀμην, Ἀμην*, i.e., “Verily, verily,” afterward so familiar in the lips of Christ. *He* does not speak as the prophets spoke. It was for them to say, “Thus saith the Lord.” *He is* the Lord. His royalty of speech betrays Him. He speaks in his own name, and takes the Divine “*Verily, I say unto you,*” upon his lips. Not, I apprehend, that any oath was necessary to ensure Nathanael’s faith. He had just listened to words which convinced him that Christ knew and foreknew all things. Nor, indeed, does Christ limit the promise to Nathanael. He passes from the singular, which He had hitherto used, to the plural. His promise runs, not, “I say

unto *thee*," but, "I say unto *you*." It is a promise to Philip, and Peter, and Andrew, and John, as well as to Nathanael. Nay, it is a promise to *all* who follow Nathanael into his presence; a promise that, however marvellous the manifestations of the wisdom and grace by which they are brought to put their trust in Christ, they shall see greater and ever greater things, even unto the end. Hence the solemnity of his tone. Because the promise is so great and wide, the Son of God speaks as his Father in heaven had been wont to speak. For when God made promise unto Abraham, and to his seed after him, "He confirmed it *by an oath*." Men swear "because an oath for confirmation is an end of all strife." And therefore "God willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, saying, "Αμην (verily), blessing, I will bless thee; that by two immutable things" (viz., the promise *and* the oath) "in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation." Man swears to put an end to the strife of doubt; and therefore God swore. Yet even in condescending to our level, God asserts his native majesty. For "men swear by the greater; but God, because He could swear by no greater, sware by Himself." In like manner Christ condescends to the weakness of our faith, in his Αμην, Αμην. For our stronger consolation he gives us two immutable things instead of one, an oath as well as a promise. Yet, in stooping to our level that He may anticipate our doubts, *He* also, like his Father, asserts his Divine Majesty, saying, "Verily, verily, *I* say unto you," swearing by Himself, because He can swear by no greater.

What, then, is this great promise the immutability of which is so solemnly guaranteed? In so far as it was addressed to Nathanael, no doubt it meant that, for him, the dream of his father Jacob should be fulfilled and sur-

passed. Because he was a true Israelite, the momentary vision of Jacob was to become to him a sacred and abiding reality. He would thenceforth see, no golden ladder rising for an instant to heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it, but the Son of God Himself binding heaven and earth together, bringing down to earth the gracious influences of the world unseen and eternal, and lifting the spirits of men into a growing communion with their God and Father. In so far as it pertains to us, and to all who believe in Christ, the promise connects itself with the history of our Lord's baptism in the Jordan and his temptation in the wilderness. It is a pledge that what Christ Himself saw and enjoyed, that we also shall see and enjoy in and through Him. As He came up from the river, the heavens were opened and the Spirit came down and abode with Him. As He issued from his conflict with the Tempter in the wilderness, the angels came and ministered unto Him. These were the great spiritual experiences through which the Lord Jesus had passed before He made his promise to Nathanael, and, through him, to us. And, He hastens to use them for our comfort and instruction. We are not to conceive of these wonderful experiences as exceptional, as peculiar to Him. We are to share them with Him, if only we listen to his voice and follow Him. As we follow Him we, too, shall walk beneath an opened heaven, and enjoy the gracious ministries of the happy spirits who do always behold the face of our Father who is in heaven, and who are never nearer to Him than when they minister to us. And Christ Himself is to be the medium by which the heavenly ministries come down to us and by which we climb toward heaven. With the eye of faith we are to see that the fleeting vision of an antique age has become a glorious and permanent fact in the new day which the Lord has made. We are to see and know that that fellowship with

God, in which our true life consists, broken of old by the sin of man, has been restored by the man Christ Jesus.

This was Christ's first promise to his disciples. How often must they have recalled it as the years passed, leading them through many sorrowful changes and disappointed hopes! How often must the darkness of tribulation have grown luminous to them as with the golden ladder whose top touched the sky, and musical as with the songs of the angels who thronged its shining rounds!

And this is Christ's first promise to *us*, the promise with which He salutes us as we enroll ourselves among his disciples. If we come, *as* we come to Him, we are at once reunited to the God from whom we had been alienated through sin that was in us, and commence an ascent which will at last conduct us to his presence. And ever thereafter we see more and more clearly that all the revelations of God to men reach us through Christ, and that all the powers and ministries by which we are raised and brought near to God flow to us through Him. Has not the promise been fulfilled? Is it not being fulfilled to-day? Does not the Church, does not the world, owe its best knowledge of God to Christ Jesus the Lord? Is not our only hope or being recreated in the image of Him that created us, and of being made partakers of his rest and glory, the gift of Christ? Which of us does not know and feel that we owe to Him whatever has brought heaven nearer to us, or raised us nearer to heaven? We *have* seen, then, the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man; and we shall see all things in heaven and in earth reconciled in Him more and more fully, as our faith looks to Him with wider eyes and grasps Him with more steadfast hands. This promise *is* to us and to our children. Having, therefore, received so great a promise, let us purge ourselves from all soils of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

## XVI.

*Freedom by the Truth.*

ST. JOHN viii. 32.

“**T**HE truth,” said the Lord Jesus, “shall make you free.” But free from what?—from sin? Yes, free from sin: for He goes on to explain that “whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin,” and that only He, who is the Truth and came to bear witness to the truth, can free men from that base servitude. But we do not thus exhaust the meaning of his words. What He promises to those who continue in the truth is, not only freedom from sin, but absolute and perfect freedom; freedom from every form of bondage, from every shackle that galls and fetters the native motions of the soul; freedom from the bondage of sense, from the evil force of custom and habit, from the fear of man and the fear of death, from the burden of tradition and the yoke of law; freedom in every kind—perfect absolute liberty, is the gift of Him who is the Truth.

It is a large promise; but has it not been verified? Think what Christ the Truth did for the Twelve who first followed Him. They were simple illiterate men, enslaved by many passions, many customs, many maxims, many fears. The priest and the rabbi looked down upon them with contempt as “altogether born in sin.” And though, like the other peasants and fishermen of their time, they may have had their rude private jokes against Pharisee and

priest, they nevertheless looked up to them as the depositaries of a sacred wisdom, or as wielding an almost magical power over the spiritual interests of men. Which of them, before He knew Christ, would have dared to call his soul his own, or to oppose the dictates of priest or rabbi? Even after they had lived with Christ for many months—for they did not know Him as He was till He had left them—his audacity in opposing his authority to the priestly authority made them shiver with apprehension; they were for ever dissuading Him from the dangerous course He seemed bent on taking.

Their deference to mere *wealth*, again, was abject to a degree which would be surprising if we did not see a deference as abject every day. As the rich man swept by in his robes of Egyptian linen and Tyrian purple, they did him obeisance as a being of higher nature and worth than themselves. They could hardly believe their ears when Jesus said it was very hard for a rich man to be good. They were amazed. They asked, "Who, then, can be saved?" Their thought was, "If there is little chance for him, there is none for us." It seemed to them that the rich man was to have the best of the next world as well as the best of this; that, if the wealthy were not to be saved, the poor and needy would very certainly be lost.

How came they by such a thought? It was not suggested by their Scriptures. The Hebrew Scriptures, so far from teaching that the rich were the favourites of heaven, shew everywhere a very special tenderness for the poor, the afflicted, the needy, and him that hath no helper. So far from hinting that the opulent, by their costly sacrifices and vows, secured the goodwill of God, the Hebrew Scriptures said very plainly that obedience was better than sacrifice—that God cared nothing for sacrifices, save as they expressed a docile loving heart. How, then, came the disciples, in

common with all the Jewish poor, to think of the rich, simply because they were rich, with an awe that would be ludicrous were it not so pitiable? They had learned it from the traditions which made void the law. These traditions, as the work of the priests or priestly-minded men, naturally put great value on the punctual and generous payment of tithes, offerings, vows, and on the wealth which enabled men to cast rich gifts into the treasury. And these traditions had invaded every province of human life; making every day of the week as rigid and unlovely as a Scotch Sunday. On the Sabbath, for instance, no man might light a fire, or walk more than a few furlongs, or carry a little food to a sick neighbour. On other days, every joint they ate must have passed through the priest's diminishing hands, and the garden-herbs which came to table with it must have paid tithe to him; the garments they wore must be of a certain pattern, and hue, and substance, and must contain certain threads and fringes. At some seasons a man might not so much as kiss his wife or fondle his children. An iron rule—the rule of the priesthood—extended over all forms, and relations, and intercourses of life. To sin against it was to sin against an authority the most august; it was to become singular; it was to be condemned as wicked. And to this rule the disciples submitted till Christ set them free; till He led them through corn-fields, and taught them to succour the afflicted, on the Sabbath-day; till He set them the example of eating with publicans and sinners, laying hands on the leper, and loving the Samaritan or the Gentile no less than the Jew.

Before they knew the truth, moreover, they were in bondage to their own evil passions. Do you know what the morals of many a fishing-village are like? You may be very sure that they were no purer in Galilee, under an Eastern sky and in the wickedest age the world has seen,



strongest reason? Was it nothing to be set free from this?—to grow, as towards the influence of the Truth he did grow, into a more conscious man, feeling all the wild forces and vapoury impulses of his nature well in hand, and directing himself body, soul, and spirit, to an aim as lofty as man ever had?

Again: death was very terrible to the Jew. He found there are intimations even in the Old Testament Scriptures of a life beyond the grave. He found "the resurrection" was an accepted belief in the East, and that the largest and most popular school of Hebrew thought. But what assurance of the future was a single spiritual person likely to find when asked was raised against school and sect? Hebrew considered learned bookmen, the one holding that there was, the other expending that there was not, a resurrection and a life for the dead? Even if he least inclined to the larger belief, was there need yearning or striving in the thought that the dead he loved were gathered in some shadowy garden, far beneath the wild earth, or that they lay silent, directed by pleasant dreams, or that they wandered that shadow through a world as unendurable as themselves, and that, if he were very good and very clearest of good and evil, he might come by and by home? With a friend in the desert, or with no better hope than this, is it any wonder that he was all too human in knowledge of the fear of death? To be freed from that fear, as humanly men by Christ the Jew; to be enfranchised into happy certainties, not a sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection and of life eternal—one not that death? was it not all?

No, it was not all: for, besides the sure hope for the future, there is a present deliverance far greater than any to which I have yet referred—viz., freedom from sin. So long as men are good simply because they must, or ought to, be good, so long as the law is visible there—a thing to

be thought of, and remembered, and obeyed with difficulty or reluctance, they have not the full and entire freedom of the truth. They will be haunted by the fear of forgetfulness, the fear of failure, the fear of punishment; and where fear is, there are bondage and torment. Before they can be free, they must have the law within them, written on their minds and on their hearts. It must no longer be imposed upon them by an external authority, or obeyed with reluctance and effort; they must have become a law to themselves; their will must have become so at one with God's will that their obedience is instinctive and unconscious, effortless and inevitable. This is the last attainment of piety, the crowning liberty of perfect freedom. But even thus far Christ the Truth made his apostles free. They could not only do God's will, but prefer it to their own, rejoice in doing it, nay, rejoice in dying to make it known and loved by their fellow-men. It even seemed that "the law was *dead*" to them, and they to the law; that it was no longer they who lived, but Christ who lived in them, and, in the unfolding energies of his Spirit, carried them to those heights in which obedience is at once a supreme necessity and a supreme joy.

Christ set them free. As they grew to know Him, every bond which galled them was broken in sunder. Their evil lusts were subdued; the very defects of their unbalanced natures were corrected. They walked erect, free from all fear of man. Wealth could not awe them, nor priestly authority, nor rank, nor even the current habits of the time. They met kings and judges with a spirit as high and regal as their own. They paid, and were conscious that they paid, to God a worship loftier than that of the Temple hierarchy; they out-taught, and knew that they out-taught, the rabbis; they rose above all reach of law in virtue of an obedience as prompt, and instinctive, and affectionate as that of gracious childhood. So far from fearing death, they stood

“ready to be offered up,” nay, “longing to depart” and be with Christ, knowing very well that to die was to enter on a life more vivid and intense, more varied, and noble, and joyful.

“Do any ask, “*How* were they lifted from a bondage so manifold to a freedom so entire?” The answer is simple and direct: “*The truth* made them free.” Do any ask, “But what truth?” the answer is still plain: “The word spoken by Christ, continuing in which they knew the truth, and were his disciples indeed.” But if any ask, “*What* was the word that Christ spoke, and how did it operate toward freedom?” the answer is more complex and difficult; for it impairs the force of the answer to omit from it a single truth Christ taught, since the whole body of his truth hangs together in a vital unity. But though our answer have the less force, it may have a sufficient force if we say, “The truth Christ taught and by which He set men free was this: that God was their Father and Saviour, that He really loved them, and would make any sacrifice to ransom them from evil. The truth He taught was, that to love God and his neighbour with all his heart was the whole duty of man. The truth he taught men was, that heaven was their home, the home in which they would dwell with God for ever, if only they accepted his salvation, and were diligent to discharge the duty of love.”

Christ *taught* this truth—nay, rather, Christ *was* this truth; it was incarnate in Him. He taught the Father’s saving care for us, by the tenderness *He* shewed to children, to the poor and sick and needy, to the unrighteous and the lost; by his personal dependence on the care of his Father in heaven, by becoming a willing sacrifice for our sins. If Christ were God and God would die for us, what is there that He would not do? If the Father loved the Son, and

yet gave Him up for us all, what is there that He would not give? The Son taught us to love God and our neighbour by Himself loving God with a love stronger than death, and by invariably preferring every man before Himself. He taught us that heaven is our home, by taking our nature up into heaven, by conquering death and Hades, by laying down a path of life through the great darkness, by shedding down from heaven the gifts and graces by which we are made meet to enter it.

How, then, could those who knew Christ the Truth but rise above all fear? What to them was the judgment of men, however wise or sacred, as compared with the approval of their God and Father? What was the wealth of the rich as compared with the treasure they were laying up with Him? What did it matter that they were poor and despised, the contempt of the schools, the execration of the synagogue, that they had to pass through "afflictions, necessities, distresses;" to endure "stripes, imprisonments, labours, watchings, fastings," if in all these they could serve God and man? What was it to them that the tent in which they tabernacled was dissolved, when they knew that they had a building of God, a temple not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens? To men who have learned the great secret of life, who, though sorrowful, are always rejoicing; though poor, make many rich; though having nothing, possess all things; though dying, yet, behold, they live: to men such as these there is no more any fear, and therefore no bondage. The truth has made them free, and they are free indeed.

How is it, then, that *we* are not free—we who love the truth? That we are not free we must sorrowfully admit: for who is there among us who does not defer to high rank or great wealth with an excessive deference? Which of us

is not in bondage to some great teacher, priest, or rabbi of past or present times, accepting his conclusions, not because we have tested them and found them true, but because they are his, or we think they are? Which of us is not in bondage to the maxims and customs of the society in which we live—suffering them to prescribe our dress, our manner, our hours, our hospitality, the whole outward form of our life; not because we always think them wise or wholesome, but because we do not dare to be singular? Which of us is not the slave of his own passions and frailties and defects, suffering that in us to rule which should only serve? Which of us is altogether free from the fear of death? And, alas! how few of us have learned to do God's will as though it were our own will; not from fear, but from love; not with reluctance and difficulty, but with an instinctive certainty, a healthy unconsciousness, a constant alacrity and joy?

The fault is not in the truth, and cannot be; for that has made other men free from the very bonds in which we are held. Nay, we know and admit that the fault is not in the truth,—that did we but abide in the word of Christ, it would set us free. We cannot but see that if we really believed God to be our Father and Saviour, if we believed that to love Him and our neighbour was our one all-including duty, that to die was to go home to the life of heaven, we should at once lose all fear of man and of death, of loss and of change. We should be free as the apostles were free, as Christ Himself was free. We know that nothing but the truth of Christ can give us the freedom we crave; we know that, if we were only to receive his truth and give it full play, perfect absolute freedom would be ours.

But, ah! what an “only” that is! How hard it is for us to detach ourselves from the influence of tradition, of habit, of the vast and complex social order in which we live, of the senses and the prejudices we have so long

indulged ! We are slaves at heart, although we long to be free ; we love some of our chains too well to part with them, although, when they gall us, we cry out for liberty. Let us take heart from the story of the Twelve. Christ was very patient with them, It was not in a day that they rose to freedom. They often blundered, often relapsed, often hugged the chains which the Truth came to strike from them. Their task was as hard as ours, and as tedious, and often seemed as hopeless. And Christ will be patient with us—will have “long patience,” if only our hearts point to truth and freedom. He will be helpful as well as patient, teaching us truth as we are able to bear it, bestowing grace on grace as we can use it, leading us step by step as we can take it. Let us put our trust in Him, let us steadfastly believe that He can set us free, and try to become free, and try again ; and, at last, after many failures, many relapses, many sorrows and remorse, we shall rise to the perfect liberty of a perfect obedience.

## I.

### INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM.

There is a conflict between opposing tendencies in our nature of which we become early conscious. On the one hand, we constantly tend toward bondage—bondage to our own lusts, to the social habits of our time, to its intellectual creeds, to its moral or immoral maxims ; and, on the other hand, we are animated by an intense passion for freedom, to which every form of bondage is simply intolerable. No sooner do we discover that our liberty has been curtailed, that, whether owing to our own base submission to the growing power of any personal craving or habit, or the usurpation of any alien authority, we can no longer choose our own course of action, and abide by it, than we begin

to fret against the yoke into which we have thrust our foolish necks, and struggle to be free. The upshot of our struggles is not, for the most part, encouraging. Too often, after a brief revolt, we sink back into our former captivity, and sink all the deeper for the effort we have made to rise and assert our freedom. Which of us cannot recall many such ineffectual conflicts, many such growing defeats? It may be that we have fallen into some base physical indulgence injurious to health; or we become conscious of some moral weakness which renders us unstable in purpose and action; or we are taught by some sudden shock and onset of truth that certain of our traditionary beliefs are unsound; or we discover that our deference to the current maxims has grown excessive: we feel that it is high time we made a stand, that if we go on much longer as we are going now we shall be utterly enslaved. And we make our stand. For a time we present a bold front to the alien usurping force. But soon we grow weary, unwary, forgetful. A new temptation, the old foe with a new face or an added force, assails us, and we succumb. Once more we are overcome; once more we are led away into captivity; and the conflict, now more arduous and hopeless than ever, has all to be begun again.

Is there, then, no way of escape for us? Must we resign ourselves to the miserable bondage we dread and hate, which, if it do not undo us, will at least injure our character and impair our welfare all our life through? No, we need not do that. There is one way of escape. He who, by leading captivity captive, came to give liberty to them that were bound—*He* overcame all the forces by which we are overcome; and *He* can teach us how to break our bonds in sunder, and to cast away from us these detestable cords. As we lie, defeated and enslaved, groaning over our own weakness and the manifold oppressions of our captor, *He* comes

to us, the golden keys of freedom and hope in his hands, and says, "I will make you free. Arise, follow thou Me."

Shall we "take our heart in our hand" and go after Him?

Before we do that, let us at least be sure that He can set us free, that He is not betraying us, with new illusions, into new defeats.

But how shall we acquire this happy certainty? There are more ways than one of reaching it. We may ask, for instance: Has He ever redeemed men as weak and sinful and vacillating as we are, from a captivity as deep and hard as ours? And to this question I have already replied. I have shewn how the Twelve who first followed Him were in bondage to the priests, in bondage to the rich, in bondage to tradition, to habit, to passion, in bondage to the fear of loss, and change, and death; in bondage to law: and how by teaching them that God was their Father, and love their duty, and heaven their home, Christ the Truth delivered these unlettered, weak, sinful peasants and fishermen into an absolute freedom, a perfect liberty. He *has* set men free, therefore, and men whose bondage was even more entire and bitter than our own: and, if them, why not us?

But there is another road to the same conclusion, and it is this:—We may note the various forms of bondage in which we are held, the various kinds of freedom we need and crave; and we may ask—Is there in the truth which Christ taught, and was, any natural affinity with freedom? Can we see how, if we receive the truth as it is in Him, that truth must make us free? I think we can; and it is that question which I now propose to answer.

Now, all the forms of bondage which we resent, all the kinds of freedom we crave, may be summed up under three words—*intellectual*, *social*, and *moral*. Intellectually, we are in bondage, or are apt to be in bondage, to priestly authority, to tradition, to the prejudices and limitations

which result from our mental structure and habits. Socially, we slip into bondage to the force of custom, to the influence of rank and wealth, to the fear of loss and change. Morally, we run the hazard of bondage to the lusts and defects of our nature, to the fear of death, to the yoke of law. And the question is: Is the truth of Christ adapted to set us free from all these bonds? Does it contain forces antagonistic to those by which we are commonly subdued, and of a more sovereign potency? Is it true, can it be proved to be true, that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty?" Let us try to give as fair and complete an answer to this question as our brief limits will admit.

And, first, for *Intellectual Freedom*. Can Christ the Truth give us that?

The mental freedom of the Jews was in much curtailed by the influence and assumptions of the priesthood. The sons of Aaron held themselves to have, and had, the right of appearing before God for the people, of mediating between God and man. On this foundation they built up a lofty structure of sacerdotal pretensions. Their pretensions and assumptions were long held in check by the prophets who, though not as a rule of the sacred tribe, were endowed with a special inspiration and authority from on high, in virtue of which they rebuked the errors, whether of priest or layman, king or subject. When the voice of prophecy "went dumb," a new order of teachers arose, the rabbis—viz., whose teaching, although in much of a wider scope than the priests could approve, was for the most part in harmony with their conservative and restrictive spirit. Between them the priests and rabbis devised a code of rules—a system of petty irritating maxims—which intruded into every province of human life, crushing it out of its natural shape, and destroying all the grace of voluntary action and

service. They despised the people "who knew not the law." They conceived of them, in so far as they were left to themselves, as bent on going astray after lies. Hence they loaded them with fetters hard to be borne, and imposed galling burdens upon them. Their aim was to *force* them into obedience—obedience, remember, not to the large generous moral law given by Moses, but to the rabbinical traditions which made void the law.

Can we find no parallel to that in our modern life? There are only too many parallels. At this moment most of the great nations of Europe are groaning under a priestly tyranny as elaborate, as inflexible, as cruel, as adverse to all the grace and freedom of spiritual life as that imposed on the Jews, or are breaking out into revolt against it.

Even here, in England, the same conflict between priestly usurpation and the inalienable rights and liberties of the soul is carried on with no less virulence, though on a smaller scale and within narrower lists. We read every day of men who claim to be the sole authorized representatives of God upon the earth—an exclusive priestly class, possessed of a magical power, in virtue of which they, and they alone, can mediate between men and God. As the only authentic ministers of religion, they affect to give rules and impose observances by which our common life is to be made sacred, to intrude into our most intimate relations, spiritual and domestic. We are to submit to their authority as the higher law, even when it is in flat rebellion against the authority of the State. They, and only they, can make us "children of God." Only by their help can we become "regenerate, and grafted into the body of Christ's Church," or hope "to inherit the kingdom of heaven."

"But we are Protestants, who claim and use our right of private judgment. We are in bondage to no man, and to no class of men."

Are we not? Are there no dead men who rule us from their graves, although, when living, they would have been the first to disavow any authority over our faith, any right to restrict our freedom? Are not Luther, Calvin, Arminius, Wesley well nigh "names to conjure with?" Do they not exercise an almost magical power over myriads among us? Are there no living *authorities*, as we call them, whose judgment we take to be pretty nearly final on all questions of truth or error, of ortho- or hetero- doxy, of ecclesiastical form or procedure? In short, do not tradition, and authority, and custom, and fear of change in much restrict our natural liberty, and bring us into a bondage from which, if we sometimes fret at it, we do not always care to escape?

Now that Christ the Truth sets us free from all these forms of bondage, if only we will let Him, *we* surely cannot doubt who hold his Gospel in our hands. For it is not only that He teaches this doctrine or that which tends to liberty, but the whole drift of his teaching and influence runs right in the teeth of all that claims to hold us in bondage. He replaces tradition with Scripture, and bids us search the Scriptures for ourselves, and draw our own conclusions from them. He dethrones the priest by proclaiming Himself the Great High Priest of our confession, and by bidding us draw near unto God through Him, on the express ground that no man can by any means atone his brother's sin. Are we disposed to adopt the current maxims of morality, without asking whether or not they are true and rest on the Divine will? He rebukes us with the demand: "Why of *yourselves* judge ye not that which is right?" Are we disposed to shelter ourselves under cover of antiquity, authority, custom, habit, use? He drives us from these frail refuges with the warning, "Every man must give account of *himself* unto God." Wherever we get our articles of belief and our principles of action, He affirms that we—we ourselves, we

alone—are responsible for them, and for the use we make of them. It does not matter what our motive may be for deferring to authority, or custom; whatever it may be, we shall have to give account to Him for what we believe and do. We may be humble and diffident: we may say, “I am not wise enough to determine the great questions of truth and morality for myself. I fear that, were I to begin to inquire into them, were I once to lift anchor and set sail on the wide sea of truth, I should be tossed on opposing waves of speculation, and driven to and fro by storms of doubt, and altogether miss the desired haven.” Or we may be of an easy indolent temper, and say, “It is too much trouble to look into matters so high and difficult. I am quite content to think as my fathers thought before me, or as my neighbours are thinking now.” But, whatever the plea by which we seek to evade the toil and risk of personal thought and personal responsibility, the Great Master, to whom we stand or fall, virtually says to each one of us, “You *must* think and judge for yourself. I hold you responsible for every conclusion at which you arrive, on which you act. I am the Truth, and sooner or later you must give account of yourself to Me. I will hold no priest responsible for your sins and errors—no rabbi, no doctor, no church. You yourself must answer for yourself—for your own convictions, whether they be true or false; for your own deeds, whether they be good or bad.”

We can no more escape our individual responsibility than we can jump off our own shadow. Simply because we are rational creatures, we are responsible creatures; because we have the faculty of moral judgment, God, who gave us the faculty, and gave it to be used, will have us use it. And there is no escape from responsibility, that there may be no excuse for bondage. It may be hard, it is hard, that we should have to decide all questions of truth and duty for

ourselves, and to answer for our decisions at the bar of God. Yet this sore task is simply the price we have to pay for our freedom. We answer to God, that we may not answer to man ; we are accountable to Him, that we may be free of all men ; we have to stand at his bar, that we may stand at no other bar. At his judgment-seat the priest cannot appear for us, nor the teacher, nor the church ; neither our fathers, nor our neighbours. We must appear for ourselves. But if they cannot answer for us, neither are we called upon to answer for them, or to them. If we must give account of ourselves, for ourselves, to God, *they* have no right to call us to account, to summon us into their courts and pass their verdicts upon us. They may still teach and help us, and we should be very grateful for whatever help they give ; but they have no longer any authority over us or our faith. If any of them come to us and say, " You must believe this or that, for the venerable fathers believed it, or the Church has pronounced for it, or in virtue of our apostolic descent *we* decree it," we can only reply, " Stand aside a little, and let us judge for ourselves. *You* cannot answer for us, nor the Church, nor the fathers ; and if we must answer for ourselves, we must think and decide for ourselves. Convince us that what you teach is true, and we submit, not to you, but to God, and heartily thank you for having taught us his will. But if you claim authority over our faith, if you affirm that we are bound to believe what you teach, simply because you teach it, know that you usurp the honour due to God alone, and by your very claim prove that *you* are not of the truth."

But if we have thus far taken up the freedom of the truth ; if we know and feel that our responsibility to God liberates us from all bondage to men, we have not even yet escaped all danger of mental bondage. Free from other men, we may be in bondage to *ourselves*.

No one can have attentively considered himself, without having discovered that he runs some risk of becoming his own slave. I do not now speak of that servitude to physical lusts and to the baser passions to which many a man, once free, has sunk ; but of a servitude much more subtle, and therefore, in some respects, much more perilous. Whether derived by inheritance from our fathers, or from habits formed before we reached mental maturity, we all know, or may know, that there are certain qualities, tendencies, leanings, in our nature which largely affect, which go far to constitute, our individual character and to make us unlike the one to the other. By virtue of these individual peculiarities of mental structure, we are prepared to welcome one view of truth and duty rather than another. One man is a born Platonist, another a born Aristotelian. One man is naturally of a conservative, another of a progressive, spirit. One man is of a hard rigid temperament ; the love of order, authority, rule, is strong within him ; and whatever in the truth accords with his temper—as, for instance, the strict government of God, the virtue of an orderly obedience, the righteousness of punishment—is eagerly received and dwelt on with a disproportionate fervour and intensity ; while, on the other hand, he is in danger of overlooking or undervaluing such aspects of truth as reveal a mercy, a generous allowance for human weakness, a breadth of charity, a compassion for the vile and lost, alien to his own temper. Another is a good easy man, who loves to have everybody about him happy and comfortable, who is not strict to mark defects, who is very ready to forgive ; and to him all those aspects of the Gospel, which set forth the fatherly tenderness and unbounded compassion of God, are very welcome ; while all sterner views, all that speaks of love as taking the forms of a just severity, he passes lightly by, or altogether avoids.

This is but a rough illustration of a very obvious though complex truth ; but it may serve to indicate how men's creeds are influenced by their idiosyncrasies, by individual peculiarities of mental structure and character. As we look round on our neighbours, we can very easily see that most of them have suffered their personal make and habit to affect their views of truth and duty, to warp their views now on this side and now on that. Does it never occur to us that the very same process may be taking place in our minds and hearts ? That our temperament has much, or may have much, to do with our creed ? that, instead of taking full and rounded and well-balanced views of truth, we may be taking partial views, disproportionate views ? that what we really hold and believe may be, probably is, the truth *as it is in us*, rather than "the truth *as it is in Jesus* ?" No thoughtful candid man will deny that here is at least a very real and serious danger. No candid thoughtful man will deny that, even when the truth has made him free from men, it has still to set him free from himself.

And therefore it is a "good tidings of great joy" to hear that, from this bondage also, Christ came to set us free, and strives in many ways to free us. To our partial conceptions of truth He opposes the truth absolute and complete. To our imperfect characters He opposes the perfect ideal in which all human energies and virtues are carried to their highest pitch of excellence, and in which they blend in balanced and unbroken harmony. He Himself is "the Man ;" not a Jew merely, nor an Oriental, nor merely *a* man, but *the* Man, in whom the whole sum of human virtue and excellence is gathered up. Hence He can address Himself to our individual peculiarities, and does address Himself to these, in order that He may win us to add to what we have that which as yet we have not, and train us into a larger and more perfect character.

Nay, more ; the word of his truth, which He alone could give in perfect forms, has been transmitted to us through men of the most marked yet different characteristics ; through Paul and James, through Matthew and Peter and John ; in order that, as we study their several utterances of truth, our conceptions of truth may grow more perfect, and that we may be delivered from the limits and restrictions imposed upon us by our peculiar mental make and habit. All these great teachers are men of a large and noble nature ; we cannot study any one of them without having our thoughts widened and the boundaries of our intellectual freedom enlarged : but it is as we study them *all*, it is as we learn what each of them has to teach, and are led by each of them to the feet of the Great Teacher, that we come to know the very truth and to enter into its perfect freedom. I think I have known good men, and even great men, who have defeated the gracious purpose of the Lord in speaking through teachers so various in character, although of one Spirit ; men who have had their favourite writers, and have studied Paul to the exclusion of John, or John to the exclusion of Paul. Let us study both, nay, all ; for only as we study them all can we grow into a full knowledge of the truth ; only as we fully know the truth can we be wholly and altogether free—free from all men, and, above all, free from ourselves.

## II.

### SOCIAL FREEDOM.

Of all the restrictions imposed, and for the most part self-imposed, on our natural liberty, none perhaps are so irritating, and in some sense degrading, as the various forms of social bondage. Our submission to them is so irrational, when once we have examined their claims upon

us, as to be well-nigh incredible, and yet so general and so complete, that nothing seems able to redeem us from our thralldom. For many centuries satirists have aimed their keenest shafts at them, sages their most convincing demonstrations, moralists their gravest rebukes; all to little purpose. Men have not been laughed out of their excessive deference to rank, to wealth, to custom, to opinion, nor argued out of it, nor rebuked out of it. There never was a time or place in which this deference was carried to a greater and more injurious excess than it is in England to-day. It makes us the wonder and scorn of foreign nations. We are a wonder and a scorn to ourselves. In America, in Germany, in France, we are constantly upbraided with our devotion to the basest idols in the social pantheon. A coronet, a money-bag, use and wont, the opinion of our neighbours—these, we are told, are the gods before which we worship and bow down, to which we sacrifice our independence, our comfort, and even our convictions.

Is the charge true? Dare we deny it, knowing what we do of ourselves and our neighbours?

Take, first, the charge of excessive deference to *rank*. Is that true? Is it not? Is not “a lord” something more to us than a man, and high birth more than high character and attainment? If a duke shake hands with us, or even nod to us, are we not flattered by his notice? If he open his lips in public, do we not find in his words a wisdom and eloquence which we should not detect in precisely the same words from other and non-ducal lips? If we have to choose between “a baron,” or even “a baronet,” of the worst character, and a commoner of the best, are not our votes only too likely to go to the former? Do we not excuse in “the nobility” vices which in other men we condemn? Are

we not very blind to their faults, and to their virtues more than a little kind? If a lord is advertised to preach in a chapel or a hall, will not he draw crowds to hear him, although, simply as a man, he is but a weak-minded retailer of the stalest platitudes? Are there not many who, even though they form part of it, think the congregation "honoured" by his presence, and find the worship much more acceptable?

Something, no doubt, is to be said on the other side of the question. It would be absurd to deny that it is a great advantage to be born of a family which for many generations has enjoyed the highest physical and social culture; to have the best appliances of bodily health, and exercise, and recreation at command; to grow up in habits of courtesy and refinement; to be trained in the best schools; to be able to choose one's own path in life; to have, early and unsought, great openings for usefulness and distinction; to be inspired by the memory of a long line of ancestors, eminent for their services to the state, or to learning, or to religion. Which of us, if it were his to choose, would not prefer such a lot as this?

But of those who have much, we surely have the right to expect the more. So far from lowering the common standards for their convenience, we ought to judge them by higher standards. Starting with advantages so many and great, it is their shame if they are not the swiftest runners in the race of life, the stoutest combatants in its conflict. To defer to them simply because they have advantages which they have not used, and opportunities which they have wasted; to think of them more highly than of men who, with not a tithe of their opportunities and advantages, have outstripped and outfought them—can anything be more irrational than this? And yet this is precisely what we do. In the social and in the political world, nay, in the

Church itself, mere rank tells—tells heavily. A lord, simply because he is a lord, carries greater weight than men every way superior to himself. More or less, we are all in this bondage. Even those of us to whom a coronet and a pedigree are, as we boast, mere baubles, who are most ready with our fling at “the tenth transmitter of a foolish face,” only too often turn “a foolish face of praise” on those who have no claim to our respect but the accident of birth. For myself, I confess I doubt whether, could such a wonder be, if a couple of dukes were to take any one of us by either arm, and walk through street or market-place with us, we should not be somewhat elated by the honour, and wish all our friends were there to see us in that delectable company. In such a conjuncture, indeed, who *could* answer for himself?

Take, secondly, the still more common case of excessive deference to *wealth*. If money be “a root of all evil,” it is nevertheless a root which most men are very glad to grow in their gardens. Ah, what sweet precious fruit it yields! How comely to the eye! how good for food! You go to it one day, and pluck off from it a good roomy house, or a family mansion; another day, and there is the most beautiful furniture for your house; another, and, lo! a noble library, laden with the works of the best authors, is just ripe; and so you go on, gathering from this one root fine pictures, fine dresses, fine company, old wine, and new dishes, and even, if some botanists are to be believed, a long pedigree, a patent of nobility, a blooming wife, and the respect of men. Can that be an altogether evil root which yields fruits so sweet as these?

Well, not altogether an evil root. Wealth, like high birth and breeding, has some claim on our regard. It is in its abuse, not in its use, that it does so much harm. And it is

abused the very moment that we hold it to be the chief good, the very moment that we make it the measure of a man's worth, or sacrifice any conviction or principle in order that we may secure it. A good servant, it is a bad master. And, mark, it may be our master although we never see its face. We may so long to be rich, we may be so ready to take any course that will make us rich, as to be the slaves of wealth while we suffer all the pangs of penury. Indeed, it is among the poor, I think, and the comparatively poor, that the worst forms of this bondage are to be found. Dives has grown accustomed to his luxury, and a little sick of it. He knows how little it can do for him; that it is not to be compared to health of body and mind, or to a task one loves, or to a humble content, or to domestic happiness, or to peace of soul. But there is many a Lazarus who, because he has not tried what wealth can do, fancies it well-nigh omnipotent for good, and is willing to risk all in order to obtain it. No one of us, therefore, is *safe* from this base servitude. Is any one of us *exempt* from it? Not many, I fear. For what is our common life but an incessant endeavour to get more than we have, more even than we require for comfort, or culture, or happiness? I have sometimes thought that wealth must have a *magical* fascination for us, it works so potently and strangely on us. That a man should be worth a million of money is a fact which, taken by itself, is really of the slightest importance; for he cannot enjoy all that—cannot even *use* it, in any high sense of the word. And he may be old, diseased, decrepit, and very miserable. Yet if any friend with whom we walked were to say to us, "That man is worth a million," should we not ask, "Which—which?" and be very curious to see him? We might even find it hard to speak to him without throwing an unusual deference into our manner and tone. There are but few whose first and genuine emotion would be a

feeling of pity for one so heavily burdened ; there are but few whose first question would be—"How does he *use* it ? what *good* is it to him ?" We expect nothing from him. He, perhaps, has not so much as looked at us. We shall never see him again. And yet we look with an almost instinctive respect and admiration on a man of whom we know only that he has scraped together a monstrous sum of money. Has not gold, then, a quasi-magical, an unaccountable, fascination for us—a fascination, moreover, to which it is very stupid of us to yield, and very degrading ? I have known persons who, when taken through the cellars of the Bank of England, have had notes to a large amount placed for a moment in their hands, and who have come away quite elated to tell their friends—"I actually held three millions of money, my dear," or "five millions, in my own hand—in my own hand !" as if even that momentary contact with wealth had somehow done them good. How are we to interpret such trifles ? They are the straws which shew the direction of the prevalent wind. They indicate that wealth, in itself and for its own sake, is the object of a profound reverence to which it has no sort of claim.

Nor must we omit to glance at our excessive deference to *custom and opinion*. How often have we been told that we are like sheep, and *will* imitate each other when there is no need ? You hold a stick before the leading sheep of the flock, a few inches from the ground. He leaps over it. You take the stick away ; but every sheep that follows him will leap where he leaped, and the whole flock goes vaulting over—nothing. And we laugh, and wonder how they can be so foolish ; or we moralize, and say, "What a waste of power ! Why could not they use their own eyes and judge for themselves ?" Nevertheless, we are just as foolish, and quite as unnecessarily waste our powers. Some great lady, for

instance, has ugly feet, and wears a long dress to hide them ; forthwith long dresses are all the wear. Or she has a twist in her shoulders, and hides that ; forthwith all women, straight or crooked, must muffle themselves in sacks. Or a great king goes bald and buys a wig ; and all men shave their heads and strut in horsehair. Silly sheep, to go vaulting over nothing in that absurd fashion !

Custom rules all. In every class and circle you may see men straining their means, or going beyond them, because they must live in the same sort of house as their neighbours, wear the same kind of clothes, keep the same hours and company, give the same parties. We are so afraid of one another that no one of us dares to be natural, lest he should be singular. “ What will people say ? ” is a question which influences—influences quite unduly—the whole round of our habits. It prevents us from doing what we should like to do ; it often drives us into doing what we know we ought not to do. There are thousands upon thousands among us who stand in more fear of “ Mrs. Grundy ” than they do of God Himself, and sacrifice, not only comfort and liking, but independence, principle, conviction, to the opinion, or supposed opinion, of their neighbours.

Now, however we may be bound by these social fetters, by the influence of mere rank, wealth, custom, opinion, I suppose we all feel at times that they *are* fetters, and fetters which it is base of us to brook. In the whole range of English poetry there are, I think, no lines which awaken a quicker response in our hearts than the noble verses of Sir Henry Wotton :

“ How happy is he born and taught  
That serveth not another’s will ;  
Whose armour is his honest thought,  
And simple truth his utmost skill

“This man is freed from servile bands  
Of hope to rise or fear to fall ;  
Lord of himself, though not of lands,  
And, having nothing, yet hath all.”

And the point I want to establish is that, however badly we may have been “born and taught,” and although we may have been drawn into “servile bands” and brought to “serve another’s will,” Christ the Truth can set us free, can make each of us “lord of himself,” and teach us how, while “having nothing,” we may “possess all things.” Was not *He*, is He not on all hands confessed to have been, at least the wisest and best of men—and therefore “the best off” in the true sense? Should we not all very willingly give all we have to be like Him? Well, He at least was free from the bonds we so gladly wear. It was because He was “lord of himself” that He is lord of all men. To Him, Pilate the governor was not half so dear as Peter the fisherman, nor pontiff Caiaphas as publican Matthew. To Him, wealth, so far from being a coveted prize, was an obstacle, a burden to be cast away. His whole life was a departure from the customs current around Him, and an affront to the opinions of his neighbours.

Now how was this? How was it that the best man who ever lived, the only perfect man, the man whom we profess to take for our Master, was free from the social prejudices and deferences by which we are enslaved? that to Him opinion, custom, wealth, rank, were positively of no account, while with us they count for so much? It can only be that He regarded men and their life from a point of view very different from that we commonly occupy, and tried them by very different standards.

What is our point of view, then, and what was His? The answer is simple and obvious. In so far as we are in social bondage, our view of human life is temporal and worldly.

Our deference to rank arises from the fact that certain families can trace back their pedigree a little longer than we can, and from the presumption that men who descend from noble sires will have a certain nobility—a presumption which experience does not always confirm. Our deference to wealth arises from our fear of the vicissitudes of life and our love of its good things; from our desire to be protected from the one and to secure the other. Our deference to custom and opinion arises from our fear of men, of the harm they can do us, or from our desire to stand well with them. Not one of these social servitudes but has its origin and motive in time, and in the desire to be at ease in our earthly habitation.

But, while our view of human life is earthly and temporal, Christ's view was spiritual and eternal. To Him we are God's children, sent to school on earth for a little while, that we may be all the happier when we go home to heaven. It must, therefore, have seemed absurd and monstrous to Him, that one child should exalt himself over the rest because he could remember the names of the lads who had sat in his place before him, or because he had scraped together a few more of such trifles and trinkets as children think to be of value, or because he had a little more pocket-money and enjoyed more of a school-boy's luxuries. The place which each of the children held in the school, and would hold in the home, did not depend on these things or such as these; but on the progress they made with their respective tasks, on their loyalty and obedience to the Father's will, on their kindness and helpfulness to each other. To Him it must have seemed an utter perversion of the Divine intention in placing men upon the earth, that they should go in fear of one another, that they should value their brother's opinion more than the judgment of their Father, that they should seek honour one of another

rather than of Him, that they should neglect their proper tasks in order to hoard up heaps of a metal which could not help them much even while they were at school, and which they could not possibly take home with them.

It is only as we rise from our earthly and temporal view of human life to Christ's eternal and spiritual view, that we shall be free of all men. But if we rise to that view, and in so far as we rise to it, it confers an instant freedom upon us. For consider : Here we all are, all God's children, all at school, all bound to learn and do certain tasks ; bound also to help and love one another. And here is a boy who has a gold circlet—a crown, a coronet, a mitre—on his head. Well, if we think the Master put it there, or that for purposes of order this boy has been placed over us as monitor or teacher, we shall be quite content that he should wear it ; for purposes of order and learning, we shall submit to him ; but we shall not forget that he is our brother, nor be afraid of him, nor flattered if he speak to us. Here is another boy who has a pocket-full of money. Well, well, so long as we have a good table to sit down to, strength for our work, and enough to carry us home when the holidays come, why should we grudge him that ? He does not look much the happier for it, and certainly it does not help him with his tasks, or make him any more anxious to get home. And here is a knot of lads in one corner of the school who have long worked together and have naturally fallen into similar habits ; they have a style of their own, and are very punctilious about doing everything in a certain way. Well, so long as their style is a good style, so far as it does not hinder but help them in their tasks, why should they not keep it ? why should we not all adopt it ? “But it hinders them ; it makes some tasks so difficult that they have no time to attend to others ; they go in fear of each other and of every deviation from the accepted custom !” In that

case, we have no choice. We must say that any style is a bad style which hinders work, which burdens life with fears, which retards our preparation for home. We at least will have none of it, let them say of us what they will ; and we will do our best to save them out of the bondage to mere custom and opinion into which they have fallen.

Is it not as plain as the sun at noonday that if we think of men and of human life as Christ the Truth thought of them ; that if we really hold God to be our Father, time our school-term, and heaven our home, we are at one stroke freed from all the social bonds which hinder, and oppress, and degrade us ? Can it be denied that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty ?" Is it not obvious that, if we know the truth, the truth will make us free ; and that if the truth make us free, we shall be free indeed ?

So often, then, as we are conscious that we are moved by any undue deference to opinion, to custom, to wealth, to rank, let us take shame to ourselves that, long as we have been taught, we do not even yet know the truth as we should : let us betake ourselves to Him who is the Truth, and ask Him to give us of his Spirit, that we may exchange our bondage for his liberty.

### III.

#### MORAL FREEDOM.

Freedom, if it is to be worthy of its name, must be perfect and entire, lacking nothing. A single fetter, however slight, is the mark of a slave. We must be quit of that before we can be truly free : and it is the true freedom which Christ the Truth confers. His work has not taken its full effect upon us until we are delivered from every bond. We may be *intellectually* free ; we may have shaken off the yokes of priestly assumption, of authority

antiquity, use and wont, and have claimed our right to think for ourselves on the ground that we must each of us give account of himself to God. We may be *socially* free; we may have broken loose from the shackles of rank, wealth, custom, and opinion, and have claimed our right to shape our own life by our own convictions. And, nevertheless, we may still be slaves, slaves to the most dire and fatal of tyrannies; for of all bondage, *moral* bondage is the most mordant, the most destructive: its iron enters into the very soul; it infects and troubles the very springs of life.

This bondage assumes many forms of which we cannot now take note. Let us be content to mark three of its larger and most frequent forms—viz., bondage to the lusts of our nature, bondage to the fear of death, and bondage to the yoke of law.

1. *Bondage to the lusts of our nature.* St. Paul never spoke more home to the general experience than when, describing the paradox and contradiction of his personal experience, he affirmed that he found two laws, two forces, two *men* in himself which could never be reconciled, which must wage perpetual war until one or the other was conquered.\* However we may differ from each other, we all agree in this, that more or less we approve that which is good, and yet do that which we admit to be evil. When we would do good, evil is present with us. We often cannot do the good we love, and cannot but do the evil we hate. Even when with the inner better man we delight in the law of God, we find another law, “the law of sin,” warring against “the law of our mind,” and bringing us into a captivity we abhor. To love God and our neighbour is our duty; we are fain to do our duty, to find our chief

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\* Rom. vii.

good and supreme delight in doing it: but, nevertheless, our best endeavours are constantly thwarted; our natural selfishness overpowers our love for our brother; the urgencies of the flesh, and the temptations of opportunity, overpower our love of God and of his law.

Of all experiences this is the most familiar, and the most bitter. Which of us is not daily harassed by it? We begin well, perhaps, at morning; we brace ourselves for duty by meditation and prayer. We see quite clearly that if we can keep ourselves in hand through the day, if we can resist provocations, bear disappointments, and really do the Perfect Will we so heartily approve, all will be well with us, and we shall have an unbroken peace whatever may befall. But, through some fatal weakness in our nature, we cannot maintain ourselves at our best; we grow weary of the strain; we trip over unexpected obstacles, or we yield to a familiar temptation: or a passion is so urgent that we cannot resist it, and with our eyes open to the pain and evil that will come of it, we offend against our deepest convictions, our strongest and holiest resolutions. Even as we fall away, we are at times conscious that we are submitting to an alien and malignant force; that it is not our true nature, not our best self, which is assuming the mastery; that our best self and true nature are being brought into a hateful captivity. St. Paul's strongest language is no whit too strong for our use. No other words are so true, and so expressive. In our despair we say, "Sin has grown to the force of *law* in us; we are *sold under sin*; what we would, that we do not; what we hate, that we do. Wretched men that we are! Who shall deliver us from our captivity to sin and death?"

From this bondage, also, Christ the Truth can set us free. He set Paul free from it. That captive, whom we have heard bemoaning himself as he sat bound in misery and

iron, we may also hear as he comes forth from his dungeon singing his psalm of deliverance: "Now thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory, through Christ Jesus our Lord." And Christ Jesus our Lord can set us free, will set us free, if we put our trust in Him. The truth He taught, and was, has, as we may see for ourselves, a redeeming force equal to our needs. For Christ taught us that God is our Father and Saviour, that He really loves us, and will make any sacrifice to redeem us from evil. He embodied this truth in his life. In his pity, and to shew us how the Father loved us, He, who was "one with the Father," took our flesh, the flesh through which sin gains the mastery over us, upon Him, lived in it without once yielding to sin, and died in it to destroy its power and to take our sins out of the way.

Are not these truths of a force to break our chains? Whence does sin derive its power over us? From the memory of past transgressions? Christ has made an atonement for them. From the power of habit? from the evil predispositions we inherit? from the alien, but well-nigh irresistible, assaults and seductions of the manifold forms of evil around us? If evil bring one force against us, Christ brings a superior force for us—the power of a new life implanted in us to correct our evil pronenesses, and the almighty love of God our Father to protect us against all incursion of evil from without. Is not the life of God within the soul of a more sovereign potency than any evil predispositions we inherit from our fathers? Is not the divine nature, of which we are made partakers in Christ Jesus, able to cope with and subdue all the principalities and powers of evil? As that nature unfolds its energies within us, will it not conduct us into new habits of holiness? If God be for us, can we not endure to have "the world and the flesh" against us, even though they keep up their ancient

correspondence with "the devil?" O, if we have not altogether escaped from bondage to lust, that is not because Christ cannot set us free, but because we have not embraced his truth with all our hearts,—because we have too often received his grace in vain. In Him lies our hope. We shall become free in proportion as we let the Truth make us free. When we follow Him with a perfect heart, we too shall be able to chant St. Paul's psalm of praise and conquest: "Now thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord."

2. Another form of moral bondage is *bondage to the fear of death*. No man is free so long as any fear is his master, for fear is bondage. No man is free, therefore, till he has made God's will his will, for all things happen according to the will of God; and if his will be ours, how can we fear anything that may happen to us?

"But God may will our pain, our loss, and even our death!" He may. "Can we help fearing such things as these?" Only when we are quite sure that his will is a perfect will, and that his will is our good. It is because we distrust his will and love that we fear changes, and, above all, the last change. And this fear often betrays us into immorality; nay, it is itself an immorality. To escape pain and loss, and the death we fear, we are willing to take a devious course, to resort to dubious expedients, to go beyond the strict line of duty, and to leave duties, which involve risk, undone. Or even if our fear do not so master us as to drive us into sinful courses, it is itself a sin; for it springs from distrust of his providence and of his love: and of what greater sin can we be guilty than to distrust the Father who loves us, or to fear that his will may be our hurt?

Even natural religion might teach us this, has taught us

this. Thus, for instance, that wise good heathen, Epictetus,\* although ignorant of the heavenly hopes of the gospel, affirms that then only is man truly free when, "whatever is the will of God is his will too, and whatever is not God's will is not his will." It is not only foolish, he argues, but wrong of us to contend against or dread the will of Him who made us. Do we fear to lose any of the good things we have? Who gave them to us? "Who made the sun? who the fruits? who the seasons? And after we have received all, even our very self from another, are we to be angry with the Giver, and to complain if he takes anything from us?"

"Who are you," he asks of an objector, "and for what purpose did you come into the world? Was it not God who brought you here? Hath not He given you senses, reason, companions? And as whom did He bring you here? Was it not as a mortal? Was it not as one to live with a little portion of flesh upon the earth, and to witness his administration—to behold the great spectacle around you for a little while? After you have beheld the solemn spectacle as long as is permitted you, will you not depart when He leads you out, adoring and thankful for what you have heard and seen? For you the solemnity is over. Go away, then, like a modest and grateful person. Make room for others. If *you* do not go away, how are *they* to have their turn? Why should *you* crowd the world?"

"But at least," says the objector, "I should like to take my wife and children with me."

"Why," replies Epictetus, "are they *yours*? Are not they also the Giver's? Will you not, then, quit what belongs to another? Will you not yield to your Superior?"

"Why, then," urges the objector, "did He bring me into the world on these hard terms?"

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\* "Dissertationes," Book IV., chap. i.

“O,” replies Epictetus, “if you don’t like the terms, by all means get out of the way. *He* has no need of a discontented spectator. What *He* wants is such as will share in the festival, take part in the chorus, celebrate and applaud the solemnity. If you don’t like the terms, you can always depart. He won’t miss you much, nor we either.”

Elsewhere\* the wise Stoic has a pretty parable on this theme. “In a voyage,” he says, “when the ship is at anchor, if you go on shore to get water, you may amuse yourself by picking up a few pretty shells or useful herbs, if they lie in your way; but you must keep your thoughts bent on the ship, and listen for the captain’s call. When you hear it, you must be ready to leave all behind you, and obey the call, lest you be bound and carried aboard like a sheep. So also in life, if, instead of shells and herbs, a wife or children be granted you, there is no objection to that; but when the Captain calls, run to the ship, leaving all behind you, and never once look back. And if you are old, be sure you never stray far from the shore, lest you be missing when you are called.”

It is a charming parable even as it stands; but how much more impressive might it grow on Christian lips! For Christ the Truth has taught us to leave the world willingly, not because our place is wanted for other spectators of the solemnity of life, but because *He* has prepared a place for us where that spectacle is infinitely more wonderful and ravishing; not because we have no right to crowd the world, but because *He* would have us nearer to Himself, and in a better world. He has taught us to be ready when the Master calls for us, to leave our shells and flowers, and hurry aboard the ship, because the ship has been sent to carry us home to our Father in heaven. He has taught us to resign wife and

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\* In the “*Enchiridion*,” chap. vii.

children, not because they are not ours, but because they are his as well as ours ; because He will take charge of them ; because He will send the ship to fetch them to us some day, and reunite us on the vast continent of eternity, where we shall find, not shells and flowers only, but the treasures of an everlasting rest and felicity.

In proportion, therefore, as we receive the truth of Christ, we rise above all fear of death by virtue of a perfect trust in the perfect will of God, and not by a stoical endurance of inevitable fate. We are drawn by love toward those dark portals beyond which there shines an everlasting light, not driven by a hateful necessity into an eternal nothingness.

3. Another form of moral bondage is *bondage to the yoke of law*. I have already said that "no man is truly free until God's will has become his will," that "so long as men are good simply because they must, or ought to be, good, so long as the law is outside them—a thing to be thought of, and remembered, and obeyed with difficulty and reluctance—they have not the full and perfect freedom of the truth." They obey indeed, but they obey from fear of the results of disobedience, from fear of the punishments which wait on offence, not from love to God and his perfect will. But where fear is, there is bondage. We must exchange fear for love before we can be at a happy liberty.

And here again, in proof that I am drawing no fanciful and finespun distinction, but a distinction grounded on the necessities and instincts inherent in our very nature, I am tempted to appeal to the wise ancient we have already heard. In the broadest way Epictetus affirms that only he is free who is never restrained from having his will, and never compelled either to have it or to go against it ; that since God's will must be done, the only way to escape compulsion and restriction is cheerfully to adopt his will, and

make it ours. This, he affirms, is the only freedom. And hence, "a wise and good man, mindful who he is, and whence he came, and by whom he was created," cares only to "fill his post," whatever or wherever it may be, "regularly and dutifully before God." "'Dost Thou wish me still to live? Let me live free and noble as Thou desirest. But hast Thou no further use for me? Farewell! I have stayed thus long through Thee alone, and no other; and now I depart in obedience to Thee.' 'How do you depart?' 'Still as Thou wilt; as one free; as thy servant; as one sensible of thy commands and thy prohibitions. But while I am employed in thy service, what wouldst Thou have me to be? A prince, or a private man; a senator, or a plebeian; a soldier, or a general; a pedagogue, or a master of a family? Whatever post or rank Thou shalt assign me, I will die a thousand deaths rather than desert it. And *where* wouldst Thou have me to be? At Rome, or at Athens; at Thebes, or at Gyaros? Only remember me there! If a life comformable to reason be granted me, I will seek no other place but that in which I am, nor any other company but those with whom I dwell. If Thou shalt send me where I cannot live comformably with reason, I will not depart thence unbidden, but upon a recall sounded, as it were, by Thee.' " \* In another place † he affirms that the wise man, who acts on these principles, can never be brought into any kind of bondage. "How, indeed, is this possible?" he asks. "I have placed myself at the beck of God. Is it his will that I should have a fever? It is my will too. Is it his will that I should pursue, desire, obtain this or that? It is my will too. Is it *not* his will? Neither is it mine. Is it his will that I should suffer loss or torture?

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\* "Dissertationes," Book III., chap. xxiv.

† "Dissertationes," Book IV., chap. i.

Then it is my will to suffer it. Is it his will that I should die? It is also my will to die." And then he breaks out into the triumphant demand, "Who can any longer either restrain or compel me, now that my will is one with His by whose will all things are ordained?"

It was a wonderful height of wisdom for a heathen to reach; but the point to which I wish to call attention is this: that Epictetus, taught only by nature and experience, had felt the bondage of an external law, had felt that there was no true freedom for him until the law was in his heart; until, instead of an authoritative and compulsory yoke, it had become an inward and voluntary principle; until, by a wise free choice, he had made God's will his will. St. Paul felt the same necessity. Till the law was dead to him, he was a slave, bound to do this or that unwelcome task, often unable to do it, often convicted of sin, and, between sin and law, utterly undone and "slain." We all feel the pressure of the same need. If we do not love the law—*i.e.*, if we have not chosen God's will for our will, because it is holy, and just, and good, the law becomes hateful to us, obedience impossible. We may feel compelled, by our sense of its claims or by the fear of punishment, to keep its precepts; but we shall break as many as we keep, and, love being wanting, the very salt of obedience will be wanting even when we obey.

Now think what the law was before Christ came. It was a vast complex system of restraints and compulsions, enforced by the dread of punishment; it was a series of "Thou shalt nots," eminently adapted indeed to the moral childhood of the race, but very likely to provoke a mutinous "I will, then," from grown men. This yoke Christ removed from our necks, and that in many ways. He taught us that the law was, after all, only a temporary form of the perfect will of God; that it was only "Love God, love man," writ in

large striking characters which children could understand. Nay, more, He took this complex law, so stern, and forbidding, and compulsory in its earlier forms, and incarnated it in his life, clothed it in the loveliness of perfect deeds. He fulfilled the whole law, shewed us how lovely it was when obeyed, and thus won upon us to adopt it for our own. Then he took it out of the way, virtually saying to us: "All I ask is that you love me;"—and to love Him, remember, is to love God and man, for He was both—"I impose no restrictions upon you. I ask you simply to love and follow me." Of course, in following Him, we rise to the most difficult heights of obedience, for his obedience was perfect; but, as we all know, it is one thing to be drawn along a path by love of one who goes before us, and quite another thing to be driven along it by fear of the lash. If love be our motive and inspiration, we cover the ground eagerly, hardly conscious of how far we are being led; if fear be our motive, every step is taken sullenly, the road lengthens beneath our feet, and we hate both the way and the bourne to which it conducts us.

In all these ways, then, Christ sets, or can set, us free. If we believe on Him, we are no longer debtors and slaves to the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof. If we believe on Him, we are no longer debtors and slaves to the law, to do the works thereof, lest we should smart under its lash. If we believe on Him, we cannot well go all our lifetime in bondage to the fear of death; for He has triumphed over death for us as well as for Himself; for us, as for Him, death is life, and rest, and glory everlasting. The freedom of the truth is, therefore, the true freedom. Should the Son set us free, we shall be free indeed. If as yet we are tied and bound by the chain of our sins, his name is Jesus, the Saviour, to shew that He can give the remission of sins. If as yet we are not wholly free from the fear of death, is not

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Christ "the life," over whom death has no power, abiding in whom, if we are in Him, death can have no power over us? If we still groan under the compulsions of a law we find it hard to obey, is not his law "the law of our liberty," because it is only another name for "love?" Let us but love Him as he loves us, and then, ransomed from all fear, we shall get us the victory over lust, death, and law itself, and rise into the perfect freedom of his perfect Spirit.

## XVII.

## Divine Sympathy and Help.

ST. JOHN xi. 15.

THERE is no question which more frequently and deeply frets the heart of man than this: What is the meaning, what the Divine purpose and intention, of the innumerable miseries and adversities by which, at least on earth, our life is darkened and tormented? And there is no answer to that question which more commends itself to men who have had large experience of human life, and who have thoughtfully pondered their experience, than the simple conclusion of faith: The adversities and miseries of men are designed to purify them, and to make them perfect. Even this neither is, nor pretends to be, a complete solution of the dark problem of life. Why God should have permitted that evil to exist from which all our pains and miseries spring; why He permits the innocent to suffer for and with the guilty; why He permits many men to come under the pressure of calamities which seem rather to harden and degrade them than to raise them in the scale of being: these are questions, or parts of one great question, to which we hardly expect to receive an adequate and full reply. Nevertheless, if we look broadly at the facts of human life, we most of us, I think, come sooner or later to the conclusion that the miseries of men spring from their sins and imperfections, that they are designed to call attention to them, and to correct them.

This end of mercy may not be always reached ; it may not always be so much as recognized ; but that it *is* the end which God has in view, and that it *will be* reached at last, that the gracious law of love will have the final sway, is the strong consolation and cheerful hope of the wise and good of all lands and of all ages.

It would seem that God deals with us as the goldsmith deals with virgin ore. When the craftsman takes a piece of pure gold in hand, that he may work it into artistic form, he tempers it with an alloy, and thus makes it hard enough to endure "the file's tooth and the hammer's rap," and the keen edge of the graver. When the work is done, when the metal is duly chased, embossed, engraved, he washes it in "the proper fiery acid," which eats out the base alloy, and leaves the pure gold untouched. No grain of the precious metal is lost ; its value is indefinitely enhanced by the labour and skill bestowed upon it. And, in like manner, it would appear that our spiritual nature is not of itself sufficiently hard to be wrought into perfect forms ; that it needs the alloy of that baser carnal mind which tends to evil, if God is to bestow his labour upon it, and to work it into a vessel of honour meet for his house and table. The adversities, the pains, the afflictions, which come upon us are but as the edge of the graver, the rap of the hammer, the grating teeth of the file ; by these He slowly and patiently approximates us to the design, to the ideal, which He has formed of us ; and at last, like the fiery acid which separates the base alloy from the pure gold, Death comes to divide the carnal from the spiritual, to reveal the value and beauty of the character which the Divine Artist has wrought in and upon us. The sin, the weakness, the imperfection of our nature fly off in that fiery trial, and, by the grace of God, we are fixed in an immortal worth and perfection.

"Cure sin, and you cure sorrow," say the reason and

conscience of the world ; and, we may add, *the sorrow comes that the sin may be cured*. For example : Of all the sorrows which afflict us, death—and especially the death of those whom we love and honour—is one of the most common and profound. Yet would it be a sorrow to us if we were perfect ? Does it not shape itself to us as a sorrow that it may help to make us perfect ? Is it not a sin, an imperfection, in us that we should tremble to meet “the hour which to the senses is the Gate of Darkness, but to faith the Gate of Day ?” Is it not a sin, an imperfection, in us that we should think more of our enjoyment of our friends than of their enjoyment of God, and mourn over an event which, though it be loss to us, to them is great gain ? If our faith were perfect, should we not rejoice when those whom we love pass through the gate of darkness into the land of eternal and unclouded light ? And if, by the threatenings of death, God can teach us to conquer the fear of death in the strength of faith ; if, by bereavement, He can strain the last taint of selfishness from our love, is not “the end of the Lord,” in permitting these miseries to befall us, a good and merciful end ?

But how shall we assure ourselves that this is the end of the Lord ? Surely by listening to Him who came to “declare the Father” unto us ; by studying and adopting his view of the divine meaning of life and its trials, of death and of the terrors with which, to our darkened eyes, it is surrounded. From whom, if not from “the Man of Sorrows,” may we expect to learn the secret of sorrow ? That we may thus compose and assure our hearts, that we may nerve ourselves to bear change, and loss, and bereavement with a cheerful patience, let us, for a little while, sit at the feet of Jesus ; let us listen to Him as He speaks of the friend of whom death had bereaved Him, to men and women to whom, as they shared his loss, He was fain to

impart the strength of his faith and hope. Let us learn of Him that, after all, our trouble is but the dark shadow cast on these weak foolish hearts of ours by the light of an eternal joy.

Happily, the family of Bethany are among our most familiar friends. More intimately known to us than our nearest neighbours, we can take up their story at any point without difficulty or hesitation.

The point at which we take it up at present is this: Jesus is still in the retreat to which He had fled from the tumult of Jerusalem, from the anger of "the Jews;" still in the wild beautiful glen which led down to the northern fords of the Jordan. While He is here, at Bethabara, two days' journey from his friends at Bethany, Lazarus sickens and dies. And Jesus, who had simply been told that Lazarus was sick, knew in Himself that he was dead. With what inimitable grace does He announce the sad, yet welcome, tidings to his disciples, in the pregnant phrase, "*Our friend Lazarus sleepeth*"! It would have been much that *He* should stoop to call any man "*My friend*"; but how much more that, speaking to the Twelve, He should deign to say, "*Our friend*," and thus associate them with Himself in the most tender and intimate bonds! But if He is tender, He is also true. How, then, could He say of one whom He knew to be dead, "*Our friend sleepeth*"? Simply because, to Him, death is but an appearance, not a reality; an illusion of the senses, not a spiritual fact. *We are no more without life when we die than when we sleep.* We live unto God. We still live in Him who is "the Life," and our very bodies will wake and rise through Him who is "the Resurrection." And because only as we pass through death can our true life—the life eternal—manifest and complete itself in us, Jesus is glad when his friends die, when, that is, they rise to their true perfect life.

Now, however, He is glad, not for his own sake alone, nor for Lazarus' sake, but mainly for the sake of his disciples and the bereaved sisters. "This sickness" was "for the glory of God," since it came "to the intent that they might believe;" that their faith in God, as the Fountain of life, and in Jesus Christ whom He had sent, as the Channel of life, might be confirmed and strengthened; that, through their enlarged faith, they might more fully receive the power of the endless life.

It sounds hard that Jesus should be "glad," when his friends were overwhelmed with sorrow; when Martha went weeping to her household tasks, and Mary sat broken-hearted in her chamber, denied even the poor relief of tears. But, under this apparent hardness, there lies a tenderness simply wonderful. Jesus is glad He was not there because, had He been there, He must have interposed; because He felt that He could not have resisted the entreaties of the sisters and the yearning pity of his own heart. At the very lowest He would have been perilously, almost intolerably, *tempted* to arrest the natural order of events, to rescue Lazarus from the grasp of death, although He knew that the natural order was the best order. As one who distrusts his own firmness should He be exposed to passionate supplications, the Lord Jesus remained two days in the place where He was, and rejoiced when He knew that the crisis was past, that there was no longer any danger of his thwarting the merciful will of God by an unwise and premature surrender to the impulse of natural affection. Now, God will be glorified; now, the disciples will believe; now, the sisters will see the glory of God. His gladness is the gladness of relief at a great danger safely past, at a great good infallibly secured.

In the emotions with which our Lord contemplated the death of Lazarus we may find welcome and pathetic illus-

trations of simple familiar truths which, however familiar they may be, for ever need to be retouched and quickened into new life and vigour. As, for instance, these: (1) that the Lord Jesus, that the Father whom He came to declare, commonly permits the natural course and sequence of events to ensue, despite our passionate protest and pleadings against it; (2) that, nevertheless, He always interposes with his help when the true moment of help has come; (3) that his motive for delay is a kind motive, and springs from his goodwill toward us; and (4) last, and best of all, that He often *wants* to interpose in our behalf before He thinks it right to interpose.

1. *The Lord commonly permits the natural order and sequence of events to ensue, despite our passionate protest and pleadings against it.* He who, untold, knew that Lazarus was dead, also knew the bitter agony of the sisters of Lazarus, how they longed for the presence of their Friend, how they hated "that churl, Death," and resented his approach; how the whole world darkened for them when Lazarus passed out of it, and the very sunlight, and the merry songs of birds, and the cares of the household, and even the mystic strains of devout meditation, jarred on the hearts with which they had once been in happy accord. He who knew of the death of Lazarus must have felt how the sisters were protesting against that death, and against Him for permitting it; how their hearts had pleaded for mercy, for help, for deliverance. And yet He kept away from them, and let the sickness work on to its fatal close. Nay, He was kept away from them by the fear lest, if present, He should yield to their reproaches, their entreaties, their tears; lest even his steadfast will should be overborne, depressed from its coalescence with the Perfect Will, and the blessing He was about to bestow should be averted by their impatience for an immediate good.

It is hardly possible for us to consider this pathetic incident without being reminded of a thousand instances in which, like the sisters of Bethany, we have protested against an apprehended evil which was nevertheless permitted to fall on us, or passionately besought a help which was nevertheless denied to us. We are men, and therefore we are *born* to sorrow, as well as to joy—to sorrow, that we may touch a more perfect joy. We long for pleasures we cannot win; we dread calamities we cannot escape. So slight a change would often give us all we wish, our desires seem so modest, and the good we crave so certain, that, if God can in very deed lay his finger on the secret springs of life and action, and bend them to his will, we cannot understand why He should refuse the mere *touch* which is all we ask of Him. Has He not promised to hear and to answer our prayers? to give us whatever it is good for us to have? Why, then, does He not listen to our request, and grant us the good we crave? Why suffer us to weary the heavens with the inquest of our beseeching looks in vain? He does far more for others than He does for us! He gives far more to many who do not love and minister to Him than to us who have set our heart and hope upon Him! If Jesus heals every stranger in the streets of whatsoever disease they have, why does He let his friend languish, unhealed and un comforted, into the very arms of death? Why are we, who trust in the Healer, to lose our health? Why, above all, are we to see our friends and his pine through long months of agony, or sink suddenly into a tomb, from which He might have saved them? Does He close his ear and shut his heart only to his friends? only to those who love and trust Him?

Such thoughts as these, thoughts like those of Martha and Mary in their darkened home, can hardly be strange to any of us. *We* have had to endure pain and loss, and the

hunger of unsatisfied desire, and the misery of standing helpless by friends who refused to be comforted. *We* have known what it is to pray beneath a frowning heaven from which we could win no response, to call as on a distant Friend and Saviour, who made as though He did not hear; to protest against the cold indifference which suffered the resistless "wheels of Nature" to roll on their course when our very hearts were being crushed beneath them, and to plead in vain for a little relenting, a little compassion.

If we would have any comfort in our lives, if we would know what God means by sending or permitting these "huge miseries and strong," we must study those cases which are fully recorded, of which we can see the end as well as the beginning, of which we have not only the outside facts, but also the inner interpretation of the facts.

2. One such case lies before us, and as we consider it, we learn our second lesson; that *the Lord does interpose with his help when the true moment of help has come*. Here we have both a complete story, and an infallible interpretation of it. The Lord Jesus did not listen, He feared to listen, to the impassioned importunities of the sisters, because He knew that to let events take their natural course would be best for them in the end. We can see, here, that they wanted Him to interpose before the Divine moment of interposition had arrived; and that He refused their prayer only that He might interpose when the right moment came, and grant them a larger good than they had wit or faith to ask. And we must argue from the known to the unknown, from the story of completed lives and incidents, to the meaning of incidents and lives as yet incomplete. When we apprehend that "some ill is a-brewing to our rest," that some evil calamity is about to fall on us, and pray that it may pass away; and, instead of passing away, it falls, suffusing our whole soul with darkness: when we crave and

solicit a good, for lack of which our hearts are like to break, and our hearts are left to break if they will, we shall do wisely to conclude that the true moment of help is not yet ; that the help is simply delayed to the moment in which it will prove most effective, that the evil we dread will prove to be good for us, that the good we are denied would avert from us some higher good. So far as we can judge from the recorded experience of the children of God, these are the laws of his providence ; He does delay, only to enhance, his help ; He does permit evils to befall us for our good ; He does withhold the good we ask that He may grant us a large boon we were not wise enough to ask. So far as we can judge from the annals of the saints,—

“God’s help is always sure ;  
His methods seldom guessed ;  
Delay will make our pleasure pure ;  
Surprise will give it zest :  
His wisdom is sublime,  
His heart profoundly kind.  
God never is before his time,  
And never is behind.”\*

And by this recorded and completed experience we must interpret our own, which as yet is not complete, and cannot, therefore, yield a final answer to the questions by which we are perplexed. The impatience of the sisters of Bethany reads us a homily on patient waiting for the Lord. Their bitter sorrow, their distrust, their resentment and despair, were *self-inflicted* pains. Had they waited Christ’s time, all would have been well with them, as it will be with us, if only we wait his time, assured of his help when the true moment of help has come.

3. It may aid us to the patience of hope if we consider

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\* “The Rivulet.”

that *his motive for delaying his help is a kind motive, and springs solely from his thoughtful goodwill for us.* He Himself assigns two reasons for having deliberately absented Himself from Bethany, and postponing the help He had resolved to give; and these two are reasons which cover and explain most of his delays. To the disciples He said, “I am glad for your sakes I was not there, *to the intent that ye may believe.*” One motive for delay was, therefore, that it gave occasion and scope for faith. Had He granted immediate relief and recovered Lazarus from his sickness, even this would have been a confirmation of faith to those who held Him to be the Healer and Saviour of men. But that He should suffer the sickness to take its course, that He should let Lazarus lie four days in his grave, and then raise him from the dead, this, as it gave greater scope to faith, so also it far more splendidly rewarded it.

Again, to the sisters He explained that He had delayed his help in order that they might “*see the glory of God;*” and though there would have been a “glory” in recovering Lazarus from a threatening sickness, there was a far “more excellent glory” in recalling him from the tomb, in this supreme manifestation of the Son of God as “the Resurrection and the Life” of men. Could the sisters have foreseen, not only that their brother was to be restored to their arms, but also that Jesus was to be declared and glorified by so conclusive a victory over death, would they not have been content to wait? would they not have been glad, even as He Himself was glad, that He was not with them when their brother was passing from them?

Every delay of help is, obviously, calculated to exercise and develop faith. Gifts bestowed the very moment we need or crave them may indeed kindle a holy gratitude in us, although too often, in the ease and pleasure they confer, we relax into a perilous insensibility to the Source whence

they flow. But when we have to *feel* our need, to bear the pinch of it day after day ; when we crave a good we cannot reach, which recedes from us as we pursue it ; when our prayer wins no response, and our hearts are left empty and unsatisfied,—*this* is the trial of our faith, the test which reveals its quality, the exercise by which it is trained and developed. The strangers whom Jesus met in the streets, and healed at a word, could not be expected to have a vigorous and rooted trust in Him ; and therefore it was well to fan their faith with an immediate blessing. But the friends at Bethany, in whose house He had found a home, by his mere presence making it the very gate of heaven, should not *they* have been able to trust Him, to wait for his blessing ? Was it not well that they should be taught to wait patiently for Him, to break from the lures and nets of the deceiving senses, and soar into the clear bright heaven of faith ? And the disciples who had companied with Him from the beginning, should *they* have lost all hope the moment they heard that Lazarus was dead ? Ought they not by this time to have discovered what resistless energies of life were in the Master whom they had followed into the house of Jairus and into the city of Nain ? Was it not well that they should be taught and constrained to know Him as “ the Resurrection and the Life ! ” Yet how could they be taught, except He raised a man from the grave in which he had seen corruption, and from the fulness of his life gave him life ! And how could Lazarus be raised, and become a living demonstration of Christ’s conquest over death, unless he were first permitted to die !

Honour is laid upon us when God keeps us waiting for his gifts, and when He withdraws his gifts. He then deals with us as with friends. If we did not know Him, He could not expect us to trust Him. It is because He sees that we do know and trust Him that He imposes these

honourable tasks on our faith, and then rewards our faith by confirming it, by coming to our help when we seem beyond the reach of help. How else could He cause his "glory," the glory of his goodness, to pass before us? We must be strong and pure of heart before He can beneficially reveal Himself to us; and it is "in *striving* weather," it is under these trials of our faith and patience, that we grow pure and strong.

Hard as it is, then, to our mortal weakness, to believe that He listens to us when He does not answer, that He is present with us when we do not feel Him near, that He is blessing us when He withholds and when He withdraws his gifts, let us shew that we are his friends by trusting Him where strangers would doubt Him. What is our faith worth if it cannot penetrate and pass beyond the narrow circle of darkness and loneliness in which we stand, and see Him waiting for the auspicious moment at which He may step in with gifts that will raise our poverty to wealth and change our passing sorrow into a joy for ever? Those who do not believe in Him and his goodwill can *distrust* Him, and fret themselves because He does not grant them their foolish desires. And if we cannot trust Him and wait for Him, if we cannot lift a calm unwavering front to the cruelty of adverse circumstance, what are we better than they? If we do believe in Him, let us honour Him by our faith when He honours us by tasking our faith. In our keenest trial, when our fortitude and patience are most severely taxed, let us not doubt "the King most high;" let us hush the "moaning voice of fear," that we may hear Him say, "I am glad I was not with you, to the intent that ye may believe and see the glory of God." And then, knowing "*the end* of the Lord," that the Lord is very pitiful and of a most tender mercy, on the night of our grief there will dawn a morning of hope:—

“With songs sincere and sweet  
We shall arise, and meet  
Him who comes forth to greet  
Our souls with peace.” \*

4. But our most consolatory and pathetic thought is the last, that *the Lord often wants to help us before He thinks it right to help us*. Nothing makes loss, pain, bereavement, so intolerable as the fear that these are the signs of the Divine displeasure, or, worse still, of the Divine indifference. It is not calamity that is most dreadful to us, but the conviction it so often brings with it, that God has forgotten us, that He does not care for us, that He is not ordering our steps and meting out our sorrows for our good. If we could only feel that all our miseries are ordained by his wise and holy love, to purify and strengthen our character, to fit us to see and to share his glory; above all, if we could feel and be sure that in all our afflictions He is afflicted, that his sympathies are with us, that He wants to relieve and comfort us, and is only held back from giving us the relief we crave by his love for us,—the saddest lot, the heaviest burden, the sharpest cross, would lose their power to injure us. Such a conviction as this, could we but win it to nestle in our hearts, would sit singing in our hearts blithe songs of hope even in the darkest day, and comfort us with its tender strains when our spirits were most “deject and wretched.”

And it is precisely this conviction, this comfort, which is offered us in this Scripture. For the Lord Jesus came to declare the Father to us, to shew us once for all what God is like, and how He feels towards us. And *He* did not dare to trust Himself with the sisters at Bethany, lest his will should yield to theirs, lest He should be overcome by his intense sympathy with their grief, by the force of his desire to give them what they craved. He was glad He

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\* “The Rivulet.”

was not there, lest, had He been there, this great opportunity for manifesting the glory of God and confirming the faith of man should have been forestalled. While the sisters thought Him cold and distant, while He seemed to turn a deaf ear to their appeal, his thoughts were full of them, his heart was throbbing with the tenderest affection for them. It was all He could do to save Himself from interposing on their behalf before his hour had come. He felt as though it would be *more* than He could do were He present with them, witnessing their grief and their despair.

Let us take the full comfort of this thought to our hearts. For if the Lord Jesus felt thus tenderly for the sorrows of his friends, we may be sure that there is a corresponding feeling in the heart of his Father and ours; we may be sure that, in attributing these pure human emotions to the Divine Ruler of our days, we honour, and not dishonour Him; that we thus more truly conceive of Him than when, by our theological definitions, we refine Him into a cold abstraction, or a mere series of unimpassioned attributes. Our best and truest name for Him is "Love." And can Love be unmoved when those whom it embraces are torn with misery? Must it not long to relieve them, even though it may know it to be wisest and kindest to defer relief? Can we ask any good thing of Him who is love which He is not fain to grant, although He may withhold it till He has taught us how to use it, or that He may confer a larger boon upon us? Let us trust in the immeasurable inalienable love of God, and rest patiently in the happy assurance that He wants to help us even before He can help us, and that so soon as we are ready for his help, and the true moment of help has come, his help and blessing will infallibly be ours. "O rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He shall give to thee thine heart's desires."

## XVIII.

## The Day of Pentecost.

ACTS ii.

## I.

## THE DESCENT OF THE HOLY GHOST.

WHEN, forty days after his resurrection, the Lord Jesus went up on high, He bade his disciples return from Olivet to Jerusalem, and “wait out the promise of the Father;” instead of perplexing themselves with questions as to the times and seasons of his return, they were to expect the coming of the Holy Ghost; instead of inquiring when the kingdom was to be restored to Israel, they were to prepare themselves for carrying the good tidings of the kingdom to the very ends of the earth. They had not long to wait. When ten days had passed, so soon as “the day of Pentecost was fully come,” the promise of the Father was fulfilled.

The word *pentecost* means “fifty.” The Feast of Pentecost fell fifty days after the Feast of Passover. On the second day of Passover a sheaf of first-fruits was presented before the Lord, to commemorate the commencement of harvest. Fifty days afterwards, on the Feast of Pentecost, loaves made from that year’s wheat were laid on the altar, to celebrate the completion of the harvest. This chronological fact suggests a spiritual parable. For the Lord Jesus, “*the first-fruits* of them that believe,” was offered unto God at the

Passover Feast; and now, at Pentecost, God offers to man, by the ministry of the Spirit, "*the bread of life.*"

The ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ was the final conclusive proof that his humanity had been raised, transfigured, glorified by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. In his glorified flesh, in his "spiritual body," He saw God, rising through the clouds that He might go to his Father. And now a similar transformation was to commence on "his body, the Church." The Holy Spirit was to be poured out on all flesh; and, as the earnest and prophecy of the redemption of the whole world, the apostles, with the hundred and twenty believers of Jerusalem—joined, no doubt, by many disciples who had come up from Galilee for the Feast—are "filled with the Holy Ghost." Just as at his baptism the Divine Spirit had descended on the Lord Jesus, and abode with Him, so it now descended on them that were his; and in them it was to pass through all the stages of the glorious progress through which it ran in Him, until *their* flesh were purged from its corruption, and *they* could see God and dwell with Jesus in glory everlasting. And this hope, this bright prospect, have all his saints.

When the disciples returned to Jerusalem, Christ's parting benediction making music in their souls, they betook themselves to "*the upper room*" in which they had last communed with Him, going from thence to the Temple, so often as it was open, to praise and bless God.\* By prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, they had prepared themselves to receive "*the promise*;" they were as earthen vessels, cleansed by prayer, waiting for the influx of the Heavenly Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, very early in the morning, they were still waiting, still praying with one

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\* Luke xxiv. 50, 53; Acts i. 13, 14.

accord, in the house endeared to them by many memories of their Master's presence. Suddenly there came a mighty voice from heaven, rushing, like a furious blast, through the city towards the house in which they were sitting; a vivid flame burned in the air above their heads, which parted and shot, now in this direction, now in that, till a bright cloven tongue of fire sat on each of them. The terrible mysterious sound drew a large and motley crowd of Jews and proselytes, devout men from every nation under heaven, to their door, who gazed with astonishment on the bright flaming tongues, and whose amazement grew and deepened as the assembled believers, roused to ecstasy, began to chant in many dialects the wonderful works of God. To some of the multitude it seemed Babel broke loose again; others of them resented it as the wild prank of shameless drunkards; a few were impressed with a sense of spiritual mystery and hope.

These, briefly stated, were the outward phenomena and circumstances of that great effusion of the Holy Ghost which fulfilled "the promise of the Father." They are very notable and suggestive. The *wind*, which bloweth where it listeth, and the searching cleansing *fire*, are constant symbols of the Divine Spirit. That the wind should sound like a "voice," and the fire assume the form of "tongues"—this is peculiar to the narrative before us. The "air"—and wind is but air in motion—is the vital element, inspiring which we live, and is therefore an appropriate symbol of the Holy Ghost, apart from whose inspiration we have no true life. And because the Holy Spirit, in order that it may quicken life, must destroy—because transformation implies and involves destruction—because we are set free for holy service only as the evil bonds which fetter and degrade us are consumed, "fire" is also an appropriate symbol of the Holy Ghost. That, on the day of Pentecost,

the wind should become a *voice* denoted, doubtless, that the Spirit came on the disciples in order that they might *speak*; to move them to a distinct emphatic proclamation of the good tidings of great joy, to a verbal utterance of the truths diffused like the general air, through every land and every breast. That the wind came with a *mighty rush* indicated the wonderful force and impetus of their proclamation of the Word, the extraordinary success with which they should speak to the general conscience and heart, the immense scope and reach of their ministry. That the fire should take the form of *tongues*, many and diverse, indicated that the one word and voice of God was to be heard in all languages, address itself to all needs, become intelligible to every heart. Henceforth, the influence of the Holy Divine Spirit was to be broad and swift as the air which rushes round the entire world, yet distinct and emphatic as a living voice; it was to be keen and searching as the pungent fire, yet definite and explicit as the tongue of man.

But let us ask a little more exactly, What was the form which this gift of the Holy Ghost assumed in the apostles and their brethren? The form it took was this: "They began to speak with other tongues, according as the Spirit granted them to speak." Now, it would seem simply incredible that these "other tongues" denote simply an ecstatic rhapsody, such as has been heard in modern times, an outpouring of spiritual excitement in mysterious unknown terms, in sounds incapable of being reduced to any language spoken among men. The sacred history expressly declares that the multitude heard "every man the language (or *dialect*) in which he was born." Whatever those may say, therefore, who wish to reduce the miraculous element of Scripture to a minimum, we can only believe that the disciples were, for the time, made to speak in

foreign languages which they had never learned—to speak them with a precision and an accuracy which enabled every man in the crowd to recognise the peculiarities of his native dialect.

But if this gift of various speech was conferred on the Church on the day of Pentecost, was it a transient or a permanent gift? To suppose it permanent, to suppose that the whole Church now acquired various languages which they afterwards used in preaching the Gospel, is as difficult, as impossible, as to suppose that they never had the gift even for a moment. For the time they spoke as the Spirit granted them to speak. But even they themselves may not have understood the very words they uttered. For, in discussing this gift of tongues, St. Paul affirms that many could “speak in a tongue” who could not “interpret,” and declares that for himself he would rather speak “five words *with the understanding*” than “ten thousand words *in a tongue*.” He affirms also that “tongues are for a sign, not to them who believe, but to them who believe not.” It seems to have been thus on the day of Pentecost. All the believers spoke with tongues, but what they said produced, so far as we are told, no good moral effect, produced nothing but “amazement” and “doubt” in the multitude. St. Peter, *speaking with the understanding*, as well as with the Spirit, has to “interpret” them, to explain what the wonder meant—that it was “a sign to them that believed not,” a sign that Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled, and that the Spirit of God had come down to dwell with men.

Nor, in the subsequent history of the Church, have we a single hint that even the apostles had the power of preaching in languages which they had not learned. We have many hints that they could not. Paul and Barnabas seem to have been unable to speak in the dialect of Lycaonia. And St. Paul, who “spoke in a tongue more than them all,” ex-

pressly assures the Corinthians\* that he who spoke in a tongue, spoke *not to men*, but to God, for *no man understandeth him*; the man himself often could not understand himself, and therefore he was not to speak in church unless an interpreter were present. In short, all we can certainly conclude from the Sacred History is (1), that there was vouchsafed to the infant Church a sudden inspiration, in virtue of which they uttered the praise of God, chanted His “wonderful works” in various languages and dialects, previously, and perhaps at the time, unknown by them; and (2) that this power of speaking other tongues was not a constant endowment, nor designed to facilitate the preaching of the Gospel in foreign lands.

If any ask, “Of what value, then, was this gift?” the answer is plain. It was a sign, a wonder, a miracle, calling and commanding the attention of an unbelieving world; it was as the ringing of the bells which summon men to worship and instruction.

“Of what was it a sign?” It was a sign, first, that the regeneration of the world, the transformation of all flesh by the Spirit of God, was happily begun. By that Spirit, given without measure to Him, the flesh of Christ Jesus was transfigured, glorified, raised from the dead, made meet for heaven, changed from a natural body into a spiritual body. A like transforming influence was now to pass on the Church, which is also “his body.” And see, already, so soon as the Holy Ghost descends, the noblest physical organ of man, the organ of speech, is instantly glorified! the tongue, once “set on fire of hell,” now glows with the pure fire of heaven, and ardent tongues, the outward symbol of the interior change, rest on every head! First of all, *the word* of man is to be

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\* 1 Cor. xiv. 2, 28.

made pure, speech is to be consecrated, the tongue is to shew forth the glory of God. And then, organ by organ, member by member, the whole body is to be redeemed to his service, and raised to its ideal power. Nay, as the word is to the man what the fruit is to the tree, and good fruit proves the good tree, so these bright pure tongues of flame indicate that the whole man is already changed in the thought and purpose of God, that the glorification of his entire nature has commenced and will know no pause until it be complete.

Nor must we omit to mark the fact that they were "*all* filled with the Holy Ghost," that the tongues of fire "*sat on each* of them." We should mark that fact, if only because of the rebuke it suggests to the ecclesiastical and sacerdotal pretensions of modern times. Just as in the election of Matthias\* to the apostleship the whole Church took part, and not simply the Eleven, so now the Holy Ghost "*fills*," not the apostles only, but the whole company of believers. It was when at least "*the hundred and twenty*" disciples of Jerusalem, and many Galilean disciples who had come up to the feast, "*when they were all with one accord in one place*," that the heavenly gift was bestowed. So that in the two first acts of the Christian Church—the election of an apostle and the proclamation of the wonderful works of God by the power of the Holy Ghost—the laity, no less than the priests (if the apostles were priests), rich and poor, wise and simple, bond and free, male and female, gave their voices, and were recognized as occupying a common platform of privilege.

But, above all, we should mark this fact, because of the hope for humanity which it suggests. What class is beyond the reach of the Spirit of Christ, who is so degraded by vice, or so low in the world's esteem, as to be beyond the hope of

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\* Acts i. 15, 23—26.

redemption to glory, honour, immortality, if the refuse of Jerusalem, and the rude peasants of Galilee, might become temples and oracles of the Holy Ghost? The exclamations of the multitude shew the estimation in which the first company of believers was held by the "devout men out of every nation under heaven." And if they were not beyond the reach of the Divine transforming influence, who is?

Again, the wonder of the day of Pentecost was a sign that the confusions of Babel are to be reduced to a heavenly order, that the separations induced by the various languages of men are to be healed, as men are drawn age after age into the kingdom and fellowship of Christ. On the plain of Shinar, thinking to raise themselves above the reach of Divine judgment, to build a tower which no flood could drown, men had been smitten with a Divine judgment; their one language was broken into many dialects; they were divided and scattered over the whole earth. This curse is to be conquered by the blessing and gift of Pentecost. In the heavenly perfection of the kingdom none is to be unintelligible to his brother, or divided from him; the whole earth is once more to be of one language and one speech, of one mind and one heart.

Nor was the miraculous sign without a special meaning for the primitive disciples. Even yet they did not understand that they were to preach the Gospel to every creature. In their thought salvation, as it was of the Jews, so also it was first and mainly for the Jews. But this Pentecostal power of various speech, though it was not permanent, though as yet they did not comprehend its significance, was nevertheless a fresh sign to them that the truth and salvation of Christ were intended for all men; that it was their duty to proclaim the tidings of redemption, to utter the voice of Divine mercy, in every language and dialect of the sinful and divided earth.

“They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak in other tongues” “the wonderful works of God.” Ah, gracious omen! when will it be wholly fulfilled, and the Pentecost, the festival of the world’s completed harvest, arrive? Thank God, “though the promise tarry, it will come; it will not stop short.” We must “wait out” the promise of the Father; but we may wait in the strength and patience of hope. For, just as that little company in Jerusalem chanted in many tongues the wonderful works of God, so in the end, the whole world, with its myriad tongues, will sing and give praise for the redemption God has wrought by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

## II.

### ST. PETER’S INTERPRETATION OF THE PENTECOSTAL SIGNS.

When the day of Pentecost was fully come, “the promise of the Father” was fulfilled. In the early morning, while a great multitude of Jews and proselytes, citizens and sojourners, were gathering to the Temple for morning prayers, a mighty voice rushed like a furious blast through the city of Jerusalem toward the house in which the disciples of Jesus were assembled. Following the sound, the crowd came on one of the strangest and most impressive sights ever seen under the sun. They saw a throng of men and women, probably some hundreds, most of them Galileans, speaking under the pressure of intense spiritual excitement, in many foreign languages and dialects; while over their heads there played a lambent flame, which broke, and parted, and took the form of tongues; these tongues, being the visible form of the mighty voice which had hurtled through the city, marked out those on whom they settled as the interpreters of the voice. It was their office to declare the meaning of the omen, to expound its spiritual significance.

But at first they do not discharge this office—they are in

an ecstasy. They simply chant, in many tongues, the wonderful works of God. The crowd are amazed and perplexed, and can only ask one of the other, "What does this mean?" or, confounding spiritual with sensual excitement, conclude, "These men are full of sweet strong wine." It is not until St. Peter begins to speak to them "with the understanding," and not "in a tongue," that they comprehend what the strange omen imports.

St. Peter commences his discourse with a defence of his brethren. He is not irritated by the charge levelled against them and him, that they were overcome with wine, for, as we shall soon see, there was much to excuse it; but in manner and in words he quietly refutes it. "Standing up"—and standing, one fancies, very stiff and straight,—"he lifts up his voice," and "speaks forth." And these phrases imply a certain grave dignity of manner and speech at the farthest remove from the confused babble of a drunken man. "These men," he says in effect, "are not drunken, as ye suppose; for they that be drunken are drunk at night, and as yet it is but early morning. The first hour of prayer is on the stroke, and before that hour no Jew may either eat or drink. So far from being a sin against law, this that ye see is a fulfilment of prophecy. What Joel foresaw has come to pass. The gift of inspired utterance, dormant for long centuries, is now revived. The most select and sacred gift—the gift hitherto confined to the wise and honoured few—is now to be the common heritage of all who believe. Not on kings and psalmists and seers alone, but on young men and maidens, even on bondsmen and bondswomen, the Holy Ghost is henceforth to be poured out. This which ye now behold is but the earnest of the universal inheritance."

This is the substance of the first section in the apostle's discourse, and for the present we need not travel beyond it. We have already three suggestive topics for thought.

1. As, for instance, *the speaking with tongues*. I have already tried to shew that this speaking in tongues was a real utterance of foreign languages which had never been learned; but that even those who were thus strangely moved to utter foreign words or sentences did not, as a rule, "speak with the understanding," that even they themselves were not conscious of the meaning of that which they uttered. It would seem rather that they were in a state of ecstasy, pouring forth aspirations and thanksgivings which no human language could fully express; and that, though this state of elevated devotion might be very profitable to them, it did not "edify," but amazed and confounded, those who listened to them. But we may advance beyond this point. It may still further be gathered from the Scriptures of the New Testament that these utterances in a tongue took musical form; that under the intense strain of spiritual excitement speech rose into song. Thus St. Paul compares "the tongues" to the tones of musical instruments—"the pipe," "the harp," "the trumpet;" he calls this inspired utterance a "*singing* in the Spirit;" he affirms that by the Spirit "*we cry*," not say, "Abba, Father!" the verb denoting impassioned exclamatory utterance like that of a chant; and elsewhere he affirms that "the Spirit Himself maketh intercession in us with *ineffable sighings*"—or, as the phrase implies, with a musical wail of aspiration which no language will utter.

It would seem, moreover, that this impassioned chant in "other tongues" was often broken with sacred Hebrew words. In one of the verses I have just cited, for example, the Galatian converts—Gauls and Greeks—are represented as crying, not simply, "Father, O Father!" but "*Abba, Father!*"—*abba* being Hebrew for "my father." Thus, too, St. Paul himself, in an impassioned mood, even though writing to Greeks, breaks out, "If any man love not the

Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *Anathema Maranatha*," these being Hebrew words for "let him be accursed; the Lord is come." Thus also in the most ancient liturgies of the Gentile churches we perpetually meet such Hebrew words as *Adonai*, *Sabaoth*, *Hosannah*, *Hallelujah*.

On the whole, therefore, we may perhaps conclude that, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the early believers were at times raised into a spiritual ecstasy, in which language grew too poor to express the throng of their emotions and aspirations; that, under the stress of this intense excitement, they chanted the wonderful works of God in many languages, none of which could utter all they felt, or convey their thoughts to their astonished audiences; and that sacred Hebrew words, which had been hallowed by centuries of Temple use, often broke into their song. This, I am disposed to think, is the most accurate and complete conception we are now able to form of that strange gift of tongues, which seems to have perplexed the first age of the Church well-nigh as deeply as it perplexes the Church of to-day.

This conception has taken form in the verses of Professor Plumptre, one of the most subtle commentators of the present time. He represents a Galatian convert as descanting on the memorable experiences of the Church of Galatia in apostolic times. After depicting the marvellous effects of St. Paul's proclamation of the Gospel, the convert describes "a higher moment still:—"

"Upon our heads,  
Those feeble hands were laid, and through our frames,  
With strange vibrations of a rushing flood  
Of thoughts and powers fresh kindling into life,  
THE SPIRIT came upon us. From our lips  
Burst the strange mystic speech of other lands;  
We too cried, 'Abba! Lord of Sabaoth!'  
We too could raise the *Hallelujah* chant;

And from our feeble tongues, in wondrous tones,  
As of the voice of trumpet, loud and long,  
The mighty *Maranatha* smote the air.  
*We knew not all we spake*, but evermore  
The loud, clear accents thrilled through all the soul ;  
We praised, adoring. Men might count our words  
As wild and aimless, yet to us they brought  
The joy ecstatic of the eternal choirs,  
The hymns of angels at the throne of God."

Assuredly all we are told of the day of Pentecost falls in very happily with this description. We are told that the believers, filled with the Holy Ghost, began to speak in many tongues ; yet it would seem that they did not speak with the understanding, nor to the understanding, for St. Peter had to interpret them to the crowd. All that the crowd can make out of the ecstatic utterance is that the Galileans are chanting in many tongues the wonderful works of God. Nay, even of this they are not sure, owing probably to the introduction into the chant of sacred Hebrew words with which they were familiar, and hence they ask of one another, "*Do we hear them, in our own tongues, speak the wonderful works of God ?*" and again, "*What can this mean ?*"

2. But if we have at all realized the Pentecostal scene—if *this* was what the speaking in tongues looked like and sounded like—is it any wonder that, while some were simply amazed, others doubted and mocked, saying, "*These men are full of sweet wine ?*" Conceive yourself *there* ; conceive that you, going up to the Temple to pray, hear a mighty voice hurtling through the air, and are dazzled by a swift flash of fire. Following the sound, you suddenly come on a large group of rude Galilean peasants up for the Feast. They gesticulate as if in a frenzy. They pour forth a wild rhythmic chant in broken sentences of divers tongues.

What interpretation would you put upon the scene, if you were a Jew of culture, and held the Galileans to be outcasts and barbarians? Would not the suspicion of "sweet wine" occur to your mind? Would you not be apt to say, "It is harvest home; and these rude fellows, out for a holiday, have been making a night of it?"

If no such suspicion occurred to you, *that* would probably be because you knew less, and not more, than the apostles of the strange analogies between inspiration and intoxication—between spiritual and sensual excitement. St. Peter defends his brethren from the charge of drunkenness as probably he would not have defended them from an utterly gross and unwarrantable aspersion. And St. Paul, writing calmly to men whom he loved, said, "*Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be ye filled with the Spirit.*" It would have been impossible for him to pen that sentence had not the Apostle recognized a certain analogy, a certain resemblance between being full of the Spirit and full of wine. Strange and irreverent as such a comparison may sound to us, he does not scruple to make it; and it will be wiser of us to seek out the points of resemblance and contrast than to affect a pious horror at the comparison. The resemblance is not far to seek. Wine stimulates, intensifies, enlarges the vital powers; so also do the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. The primitive disciples, filled with the Spirit, were rapt in an ecstasy which showed itself in passionate gesture, excited bearing and aspect, in words that sounded like wild incoherent ramblings, and in bursts of song. And these outward effects of their inspiration closely resemble the effects of intoxication. The impression they produced on cool critical bystanders was like that produced on ancient or barbarous tribes when they first saw the effects of wine. "To them the bacchanal appeared a being half inspired; his frenzy seemed a thing for reverence and awe, rather than

for horror and disgust ; the spirit which possessed him must be, they thought, Divine ; they deified it, and worshipped it under different names as a god." \* It is often this very resemblance to something nobler and higher which deceives the drunkard himself. The sensual pleasure derived from wine is not the first or chief attraction to him. What most attracts him is the quickened sensibilities, the free bright play of imagination, the more rapid succession of thought and emotion, the sense of freedom, that wine will give ; it is by these that he is led to ruinous excess. What he desires is life, "more life and fuller," to escape from the monotony of habit and routine ; "to feel the years before him ;" to be made, at least for a time, tender, generous, eloquent ; to have the brain flooded with new thoughts of brighter hues, and the heart touched to finer issues. It is by attractions like these that many gifted and finely-natured men have been drawn on and on till they degraded into mere slaves of appetite. Hoping to become as gods, they have sunk below the level of the brute, and become hopeless outcasts from the paradise they sought to enter.

For if there be resemblance between sensual and spiritual excitement, so that we can understand how the crowd should mistake men full of the Holy Ghost for drunkards inflamed with wine, there is also dissimilarity and contrast. The one is of the flesh, the other of the soul. Wine inflames the senses, and through the senses sets the imagination and passions on fire ; but the Holy Ghost enters into the soul, inflaming and elevating all the powers of thought and affection, and only disturbing the action of the senses by quickening an interior life fuller and richer than they can adequately express. And the law of our being is, that that

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\* From Robertson's Sermon on Eph. v. 17, 18, of which I here give a brief abstract.

which begins with the flesh sensualizes and degrades the spirit ; while that which begins with the spirit spiritualizes, refines, elevates the senses. As one of our own poets has taught us, "the crime of sense is avenged by sense which wears with time." The terrible punishment that waits on the habitual and immoderate indulgence of the senses is, that the craving for enjoyment increases, while the power of enjoyment lessens. The drunkard longs more and more for wine as wine loses its power to stimulate emotion, to quicken the fancy, to give him the sense of freedom and power. But, on the other hand, spiritual excitement calms and strengthens, while it fills the soul. It gives more life and fuller ; it raises the thoughts, quickens and enlarges the sensibilities ; but, instead of leaving us feebler and duller, it invigorates us for every duty ; its edges do not wear blunter and blunter, but finer and finer ; the oftener it is repeated, the oftener we rise into a true communion with God, the more welcome it becomes, and we are the better able to serve and help men.

Well, therefore, might St. Peter contrast the inspiration of the Spirit with the intoxication of the senses ; and well might St. Paul counsel us, "Be not drunk with wine, but be ye filled with the Spirit."

3. The apostle dwells on the *universality* of this gift of the Spirit. All the disciples have it, men and women, servant and master, bond and free ; nay, the whole multitude may have it too. The promise, given by Jehovah through Joel, is to *them* and to their children. The gift of prophesying, the gift of declaring God's will in the past and in the present, as well as in the future, had been a rare one even in the happiest times of the Hebrew Commonwealth. Only a few men in any generation had been distinguished by it, and these were commonly men either eminent by official position or specially devoted to a religious life. For

nearly five centuries the gift had died out; and though the Jews hoped, they hardly looked, for its reappearance. It took them by surprise, it startled them into a deep and universal enthusiasm, when John Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah, denouncing their sins, calling them to repentance, proclaiming the advent of a better time.

But this gift, so rare, so precious, so long denied, according to St. Peter was now to become a common gift. Young men were to have it as well as men venerable with age; bondsmen and bondswomen, as well as seers and judges and kings. Nay, "*every one whosoever* should invoke the name of the Lord," was both to be saved from the impending judgments, and brought into that kingdom whose lowliest member is greater than the greatest of the prophets. And the promise was fulfilled. It was fulfilled in that multitude of prophets which sprang up in the primitive Church; in the thousands who were moved to prophesy of Christ, and to make manifest the secrets of all hearts; and in the myriads who, though boasting no miraculous gift, were nevertheless moved by one and the selfsame Spirit to faith and hope and charity.

This gift of the Spirit of all truth and grace is offered to us as well as to the Jews and proselytes of Pentecost. As for them, so for us, "the promise of the Father" only awaits our acceptance. If we believe, we *are* the temples of the Holy Ghost. If we have not the Spirit of Christ, we are none of his. But if the Spirit of Christ dwell in us, even though we be only servants and handmaidens, it will dwell in us in all wisdom. It will make us a law unto ourselves, and so change service into freedom and make duty a delight. *We* shall see visions—visions of a happier life, an ampler service; *we* shall dream dreams—dreams of an earth transformed into a paradise, of a world reconciled unto God. And our dreams will come true, our visions be realized.

The world's Pentecost will surely come, and the great final harvest be gathered into the garners of heaven.

### III.

#### THE EFFUSION OF THE SPIRIT THE GIFT OF CHRIST.

The prophet Joel had foretold the advent of a great and illustrious day of the Lord on which the Spirit of God should be poured out on all flesh, on young men and bondsmen, as well as on venerable seers, gifted psalmists, and men eminent in Church or State. To this Hebrew prophecy St. Peter, speaking to Hebrews, makes his appeal. They had been amazed and perplexed at hearing a company of rude Galilean peasants chant the wonderful works of God in many tongues. But where was the wonder, if one of their own prophets had foretold that the gift of prophecy should be vouchsafed to the simple and unlettered as well as to the wise and erudite ; to the young as well as to the old ; to women as well as to men ; to the bond as well as to the free ? If the great and illustrious day of the Lord had at last come, this which they now saw and heard was simply the fulfilment of an ancient Divine promise, and was as natural to that day as rest to the Sabbath.

Had it not been an inspiration of heavenly wisdom, it would have been a master-stroke of mother wit, that the apostle should open his address by appealing to an authority to which his audience would instinctively defer. In no way could he better conciliate their prejudices, or win a favourable hearing ; in no way could he more completely refute the charge, "These men are full of sweet wine:" for drunken men are not careful to conciliate prejudice, nor are they able to cite pertinent authorities with accuracy.

The whole harangue of St. Peter, indeed, is a striking illustration of the wide difference between sensual and

spiritual excitement. In common with his brethren, he is rapt in an ecstasy. With him, as with them, the broad Galilean dialect breaks into many tongues, and speech rises into song. But in the "torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of his passion, he acquires and begets a temperance that gives it smoothness." He is not carried beyond the bounds of self-control; he does not "o'erstep the modesty of nature." The spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet. The very moment that it is necessary he comes forward with the Eleven, and speaks with a gravity, a logical force, which his audience cannot resist, though all their prepossessions run hard against him.

Consider for a moment how delicate his position was, how full of peril. He has to address an excited mob which, only a few day since, had clamoured for his Master's death. He has to charge them with "the deep damnation of his taking off," and yet to invite them to a saving trust in Him. He has to convince them that the gift of the Holy Spirit which Joel had predicted, and for which Israel had for centuries sighed in vain, had at last been conferred by that very Nazarene whom their lawless hands had just nailed to the cross. He has to convict them of having slain, as an impostor and blasphemer, the Lord's Christ, for whose advent they daily prayed. Could any task be more difficult, more terrible, and, to human means, more impossible? Yet Peter has to address himself to this perilous task when his whole frame is throbbing with a novel and intense excitement—to step forth from a company all absorbed in the raptures of a sovereign ecstasy and to confront that wicked mocking crowd! If spiritual excitement did not calm as well as elevate, if it did not strengthen as well as stimulate the soul, how could he have attempted a task so hopeless, and have succeeded in it?

Viewed in that light, his speech is a masterpiece of

oratory, and may fearlessly be placed beside the most eloquent and persuasive orations of antiquity. As we have seen, he commences with an appeal to the prophetic promise of Joel. Joel had foretold a day of the Lord which should be rendered great and illustrious by two characteristic distinctions. The day on which the Holy Ghost was to be poured out on all flesh was to be notable for prodigies; the choicest and happiest gifts were to be conferred on all classes and conditions of humanity. But, besides these wonders of blessing, there were to be threatening portents—prodigies of judgment in heaven above and in earth beneath; the sun was to be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood. We need not pause to inquire how far these judicial and threatening signs had been wrought at the Crucifixion, and how far they were reserved for the destruction of Jerusalem; it is enough for the present to note that Joel had predicted a day of the Lord which, while it had a gracious aspect, also turned a frowning aspect on men, a day which mercy and judgment would combine to make for ever memorable.

This new day—this day of the Lord, was the Christian dispensation—the Christian era. The rule of Christ, the day of his kingdom, was to be characterized by wonders of spiritual blessing, wonders also of spiritual terror and threatening. St. Peter claims that these wonders have been wrought, that these blessings have been bestowed, that these terrors are abroad. “Jesus the Nazarene,” he affirms, “was a man authenticated by God,” in that through Him God had exhibited “powers,” wrought “prodigies,” given “signs.” He affirms that the very multitude now listening to him had seen and felt these signs, prodigies, powers; that they had already witnessed a partial fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy. That which they now saw and heard—the effusion of the Holy Ghost, the mighty noise as of a

rushing wind, the glancing tongues of fire, the exaltation of spiritual life and power in the followers of Jesus—all this was but another fulfilment, or a fulfilment of another part, of the same prediction. This was the *gracious* aspect of the new illustrious day of the Lord.

And where was the terrible threatening aspect? Ah! ask that cowering awe-stricken crowd, who, as the inspired apostle speaks, feel the burning flames dart from his tongue into their inmost heart, who have the conviction forced on them that their lawless hands have in slaying Jesus crucified their Lord and Christ, and who, “stung with compunction,” cry out in an overmastering agony of terror, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Was not that day a day of judgment to them—a day of terrors? a day of judgment that it might be a day of mercy? a day of terrors that it might be a day of sovereign grace?

This, then, is the general outline of Peter’s speech, this the logic that took fire in his words. But if we now look somewhat more closely into the several stages of his argument, it will grow more impressive to us: we shall see more clearly how, with “touches beyond the reach of art,” he convinced his hearers that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God: for to prove Jesus the promised Christ, and the Holy Ghost the gift of Christ, was the main scope and intention of his argument.

He began, as we have seen, by citing Joel’s prophetic description of a coming day of the Lord, and arguing that the inspiration of his brethren, so far from being the intoxicating excitement produced by wine, was the spiritual ecstasy for which the prophet had taught them to hope. So far his audience would probably follow him, and cheerfully assent to the force of his vindication. But he is now about to enter on a new and much more dangerous stage of his

argument. He is about to connect the descent of the Spirit with the ascension of Jesus; and here there was every chance that he and his hearers might part company. He proceeds cautiously, therefore, and yet boldly. "Men, Israelites, Jesus the Nazarene, a man authenticated to you of God by powers, and prodigies, and signs, which God wrought by him in your midst. . . . Him, being delivered by the absolute counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye nailed up with lawless hands, and slew; whom God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden by it," *i.e.*, by death.

Now, observe, Peter is very bold; for he distinctly charges them with having put to an illegal death One whose mission had been authenticated by such miracles as were convincing signs that God was with Him. But though he makes this charge, he is careful to speak in a conciliatory tone, and to abate its rigours so far as he may. He appeals to them as *men*, as having, therefore, despite their manifold varieties of race, the bond of a common nature with each other and with him. Nay, he appeals to them as *Israelites*, selecting that as a much more honourable designation than "Jews," since it recalled the covenant with the man Israel, or Jacob, which covered and embraced all who professed the Hebrew faith, binding them each to the other and all to God. Moreover, as yet, he charges them only with putting to death a good man, obviously sent among them and authenticated in his work by God. For the present he speaks of his Master not as the Christ, the Messiah, but only as "Jesus the Nazarene." Now, that this Jesus had wrought many miracles among them, they could not deny; probably most of them had witnessed some of the prodigies He wrought; some of them possibly had been restored and made whole by his saving health. That Jesus had been raised from the dead was a startling affirmation, no doubt;

but rumours of his resurrection had been ringing through the city for nearly fifty days past, and at the lowest it would be curious to hear what these Galileans had to say on the topic. Undeniably his body had disappeared from the tomb in which it had been lain, and it was given out that they were in the secret of its disappearance, and could give a perfectly simple explanation of the fact that looked so strange and mysterious.

If, then, there was something in Peter's words to anger the listening multitude—and wicked men do not like to be reminded of their lawless deeds—there was also much to conciliate and interest them, truths which they could not deny, and a prospect of hearing some authentic account of the rumoured resurrection of the Nazarene.

Having thus secured an attentive hearing, St. Peter approaches his main theme ; and now he fortifies himself by quoting an authority even better known than that of Joel, and much more likely to sway the popular heart. He cites David, the national hero and poet, whose memory was still a power among the Jews, and whose words were daily on their lips. God, he had said, has raised Jesus from the dead ; and now he goes on :—“For it is in reference to Him that David sings, ‘I saw the Lord always before Me ; for He is at my right hand that I be not moved : therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced ; moreover, my flesh also shall rest in hope, because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption ; Thou didst make known to Me paths of life ; Thou wilt fill Me with joy by thy presence.’ Men and brethren, to *you* I may speak freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and that his sepulchre is with us to this day. As a prophet, therefore, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of

his loins one should sit on his throne, he spake foreseeingly of the resurrection of the Christ, that *He* was not abandoned to Hades, neither did *his* flesh see corruption."

With the exception of that brief opening phrase, "It is in reference to *Him*," *i.e.*, to Jesus the Nazarene, there is not a single word in this paragraph of the Apostle's speech which his audience could not heartily approve. It was pleasant to them to hear David quoted; it made them feel that whatever new convictions might be forced upon them, they could not be wholly breaking with the glorious past while his authority was their sanction. It was pleasant to them to hear a Jew claiming to speak to them, as Jews, with a freedom he would not care to use in other ears. It was pleasant to them to hear David honoured with such titles as "prophet" and "patriarch," this last title having never, so far as we know, been accorded him before. And the interpretation which St. Peter puts on the verses from Psalm xvi. was the very interpretation which they themselves had been taught to put upon them. Their rabbis read, and taught them to read, the psalm as referring to the Messiah. They admitted that David's flesh had seen corruption, that his spirit still slept in Hades, and that he must therefore have been speaking of One greater than himself when he rejoiced in the hope that "paths of life" would be opened up, paths leading from Hades, the kingdom of the dead, to heaven, the kingdom of the living, by that Holy One "to whom "the pangs of death" would be birth pangs, and who would not be suffered to see corruption. All this would be very grateful to them, and would altogether accord with their feelings and belief.

But, like the Gospel he preached, St. Peter has his terrible side; and, after these gracious words, there come fiery arrows of judgment and rebuke—words that carry heartbreaking convictions although they are still blended

with arguments the force of which every Jew would admit. For after citing David's prediction of the Messiah's victory over death, he returns to Jesus the Nazarene. He affirms and argues: David is dead and buried; yonder stands his sepulchre. God has not raised *him* up. But this "Jesus did God raise up, of which we all are witnesses. Having therefore been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, *He* hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. For David did not ascend into the heavens; but he himself saith, "The Lord saith unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes the footstool of thy feet." Wherefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God made *Him* both Lord and Christ, *even this Jesus whom ye crucified*.

Wonderful, terrible, argument! With what an easy majestic motion it swings on to its climax! With what a concentrated and voluminous force it plants its final blow, reserving to the very last moment the dreadful secret and charge with which it is fraught—"God hath made *Him* both Lord and Christ, even this Jesus whom ye crucified." To have laid lawless hands on the Messiah whose advent had been the national hope and prayer for generations—to have nailed to a cross Him whom their venerated fathers, all the kings and prophets, had desired to see, but had not seen—what guilt could be compared to this? what punishment could adequately avenge it?

Yet how could they resist the wisdom and spirit with which the Apostle spoke? It was all true. David *was* dead and buried, and even in the shadowy Hadean world still dreamed of a Holy One who should discover the "paths of life." *David* did not ascend into the heavens, leading captivity captive, to receive gifts for men. He *had* recognized and foreseen a "Lord" higher than himself, who was

to overcome the sharpness of death, to rule over an universal empire from the right hand of God, and whose foes were to be trodden under his feet. And all these predictions were now fulfilled in Jesus, the despised Nazarene. *He* had been loosened from the pangs of death. *His* soul was not abandoned to Hades, nor had his flesh seen corruption. God *had* raised Him up. He *had* risen; these men had seen Him. He *had* gone up on high; they had witnessed his ascent. And here was the proof—the Spirit promised through Joel in the days of the Messiah was now being poured forth; old men and children, young men and maidens, free men and slaves, were speaking as the Spirit granted them to speak, and chanting in ecstatic strains the wonderful works of God. Jesus the Nazarene *was* the Christ of God, the promised long-expected Messiah. And they had slain Him! their lawless hands had nailed to the cross of a slave Him who was both their Lord and their Christ!

No wonder they were smitten with terror and compunction. The only wonder is that *we* can sin against Christ as we do; that by offending against the laws of his love, and resisting the influence of his Spirit, we can crucify the Son of God afresh, and yet feel so little compunction, and suffer so slight an alarm.

#### IV.

##### THE EFFECTS OF ST. PETER'S DISCOURSE.

The sting of St. Peter's speech lay in its last sentence. Basing his argument on the prophecy of Joel and the Psalms of David; proving, on authorities from which there was no appeal, that the Messiah must needs die and rise again from the dead to shed forth his Spirit on all flesh: carrying his audience, therefore, completely with him through every stage of his argument, the Apostle at last turns upon them with

the dreadful charge that it is they who, with lawless hands, have crucified in Jesus the Nazarene Him whom God had made both Lord and Christ. No marvel that, as they listened, they were "stung with compunction:" for the Christ was the hope and glory of their race; prophets had afore announced his coming as the crowning benediction of Israel; psalmists had broken into their keenest raptures, into their sweetest loftiest verse, as they sang his victorious reign; generation after generation had longed and sighed for his advent; they themselves had prayed that they might not see death till they had seen the Lord's Christ: and, lo! He had come to them, and they had not recognized Him!—He, in whose day David and Joel had rejoiced from afar, had gone in and out among them, speaking the most gracious words that ever fell from human lips, authenticated of God by powers and prodigies and signs none other had ever wrought, and they had condemned the Consolation and Glory of Israel to the cross of a slave! No marvel that the charge of Peter stung and broke their hearts. They felt, they admitted, its truth; they had no defence to make; they were without excuse. Bewildered by vague alarms of conscience, utterly destitute of resource or hope, they cry to the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Do! what *can* they do? Is there any chance or prospect for men so blind and dead?—for men who even when they saw God manifest in the flesh glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful?—for men whom incarnate Love failed to move, or had moved only to a murderous hate?

Yes, there is hope even for these—hope therefore for all. The holy Apostle carries to them the same good tidings which have come to us. He replies to their hopeless agony of appeal, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ; and your sins shall be remitted; you shall share with us the gift of the Holy Ghost." Nay,

for their further encouragement, in order to assure their dubious hearts with "words of so sweet breath composed" that they should not be able to resist the grace with which he spoke, he falls back on the prophecy of Joel which he had already cited, and reminds them that "*the* promise of the Father"—the promise of the Holy Ghost—was expressly given to *them*, and to their children, and to all their brethren scattered through distant lands; and, in short, to whomsoever would respond to the gracious call of God. He enlarges on this theme; he rebukes and comforts them "in many words" for which the sacred historian could not find room—the pith of all his exhortations being, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation;" detach yourselves from the perverse age which crucified your Lord and Christ, and He will save you, whatever sins you may have committed against Him.

The whole exhortation tended to one point—a point which happily it reached. Its burden was, "Save yourselves from this generation; separate yourselves from it; come out from it and its sins." First of all, they were to "*repent*," or, as the Greek word implies, to change the bent and posture of their minds. They had held Jesus the Nazarene to be an impostor and blasphemer, making Himself equal with God, and assuming to be the Messiah He was not. If they now held Him in very deed to be Lord and Christ, their mental attitude toward Him was radically changed, and would change still more profoundly as they were instructed in his doctrine. Already they were ashamed of their former hostility to Him; now, let enmity give place to love. They were in mortal fear because of their offences against Him; let them understand Him better and know his measureless grace, and fear would give place to hope. To this repentance—this change of mental and

emotional attitude, they were to add baptism into his name, a public avowal of attachment and loyalty to Him; and thus, by their changed conceptions of Him, and by their open avowal of faith in Him as the Lord's Christ, they would decisively *cut themselves off* from the untoward generation which still held Him to be an enemy to the Hebrew Commonwealth instead of its Lord, and therefore still harboured enmity against Him.

This may not seem a sufficiently spiritual interpretation of St. Peter's exhortation to repentance and baptism, but it probably gives very much the sense in which the three thousand converts, as yet, understood it. For, so far, they were little instructed in the heavenly hopes of the Gospel; its more spiritual elements and characteristics would evade the grasp of their unspiritual minds. Hence we read that "they steadfastly addicted themselves to the instruction of the apostles, and to the fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to the times of prayer." They were entering on a whole new world of thought and activity. They had much to learn, much also to unlearn. They were *converted, turned round*, by the wisdom and spirit with which Peter spoke; their attitude towards Jesus of Nazareth was radically changed; Him whom they had crucified they now worshipped and obeyed. But we should altogether mistake their position were we to assume that their minds were suddenly and miraculously enlightened on all that was involved in the death of Christ, and in the call to his service. Under the stress of a single overmastering conviction they had broken with the Jewish and united themselves to the Christian community; but the truth as it is in Jesus was, for the most part, still a hidden mystery to them. They had still to learn what their baptism, their vow of obedience involved. And hence it was that "they steadfastly addicted themselves to the instruction of the apostles, and to the

fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to the times of prayer."

Each of these phrases has a distinct and special meaning. The meaning of the first—"they addicted themselves to the instruction of the apostles"—is sufficiently obvious. The very first effect of St. Peter's discourse was that it set the Jewish converts thinking and enquiring. They would want to hear the whole story of the life and death of Jesus from those who had companied with Him from the beginning; to learn how his sayings and doings fitted into the framework of Messianic prediction, and how they bore on the lives and duties of men. On all these points the apostles would instruct them, convincing them out of the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ of whom their Hebrew fathers had spoken, urging them to become partakers of his death and of his resurrection from the dead.

But what would strike these converts as no less novel and original than "the instruction of the apostles," what would be even more attractive to them, was the mode of life which had obtained in the Christian community since the ascension of the Lord. While He was still with them, the apostles had formed a moving household, going with Him whithersoever He went, dwelling where He dwelt, eating of one table with Him. So, too, the disciples outside the apostolic circle appear to have regarded themselves as members of his family, and to have met his immediate followers as brothers and sisters, not simply as fellow-citizens or fellow-worshippers; and when He went up on high, the little company of believers in Jerusalem "continued with one accord in one place," living together on pleasant equal terms as members of one family—a family whose ties were drawn very close by the bitter and general enmity to which they were exposed from without. This happy *fellowship* of kindred

minds was the spectacle which took, and held, the eyes of the three thousand converts. *They* were strangers out of every nation under heaven, separated from each other by diversities of race and habit and tongue. Though they were of one faith—for they were all either Jews or proselytes—their faith was but a slack bond of union, since the very Temple itself was a scene of strife between warring sects and factions. Galilean and Judæan, Hellenist and Hebrew, Pharisee and Sadducee, Herodian, Sanhedrist, and Roman partisan wrangled among themselves and with each other. Every clique, every school, every faction, every race had its separate synagogue, where they worshipped apart. Is it any wonder that men whose very religion was a dispute, and whose most solemn acts of worship often broke into bloody frays, when they saw the little band of Christians “of one heart and one mind,” meeting “with one accord in one place,” were arrested by a spectacle so singular, attracted by a “fellowship” so pure and tender and harmonious? Here were “about a hundred and twenty” men and women of different races, grades, cultures, living together not only in an unbroken concord of worship and affection, but in a holy enthusiasm of love which made each the servant of all, and forbad any one of them to say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own! With what an eager gladness would the strangers out of every nation addict themselves to such a fellowship as this, and find themselves welcomed into a family and possessed of a home alive with love and goodwill!

“They steadfastly addicted themselves . . . to the fellowship.” Who would not gladly attach himself to a fellowship so pure and gracious? Our own hearts tell us with what admiration the three thousand converts would contemplate it. What questions would rise to their lips! “Do you really hold all things in common? Do you always

have these daily meetings for worship? Do you day by day go from house to house, eating at each other's tables with gladness and simplicity of heart? Does this strong fervent attachment, this family warmth and unity, extend to all who are in Christ? Is your concord never broken by the vanity, self-will, coldness, greed of this member of the Church or that?" Yes; we can easily understand how such a "fellowship" as this should prove even a more awakening and convincing means of grace than the very teaching of the apostles themselves. We cannot even glance at it without breathing the prayer, that this Divine charity, which alone can conquer the world, may soon once more glow on the hearth of the Church, and shed its cheerful inviting rays through casement and door.

They also addicted themselves "to the breaking of the bread." The Christian family sat at one table; while Jesus was yet with them He broke bread with them. And there would seem to have been something unique and characteristic in his mode of breaking bread; for his disciples who walked with Him to Emmaus after his resurrection, although they did not recognize Him either by countenance or speech, knew Him the moment He broke bread with them. This method of communion with each other was hallowed to the first disciples by many sacred memories. They could hardly sit down to any common meal without vividly recalling Him who had so often broken bread with them, and who, at the Eucharistical Supper, had for ever consecrated bread and wine. Hence there grew up among them the *agapæ*, the feasts of charity, in which their unity of thought and affection were expressed by their common participation of a meal. Such a meal seems always to have preceded, or to have been part of, the Lord's Supper in primitive times; and we can easily comprehend how, to such inbred ritualists as the Jews, this simple Christian rite would have special

attractions; that the three thousand would delight in it, and in asking after its meaning, both because they were Jews, and therefore accustomed to lay stress on ritual acts, and because it gave them fresh assurance that, though they had lain lawless hands on Jesus the Christ, they were, nevertheless, one with those who had been faithful to Him from the first. To them the *agapæ*, rising to their solemn eucharistical close, would be singularly welcome. They would naturally addict themselves to "the breaking of the bread."

But what were "*the times of prayer*" to which also they steadfastly adhered? Doubtless they were the three hours appointed for public worship by the Hebrew ritual for morning, noon, and evening prayer. For in the earlier chapters of the Acts we find constant reference to the Jewish hours of prayer, and to the fact that the Christian disciples still observed them. In the 46th verse of this chapter, for instance, we are told that the Christian Church was "steadfast in attending the Temple;" and in the 1st verse of the next chapter we meet Peter and John going up to the Temple "at the hour of prayer." Yet the three thousand converts might well doubt whether their new faith would permit them to retain their old customs of worship. For the main stress of St. Peter's exhortation was, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation;" and the Temple was the very centre and stronghold of that generation. It was the chief priests who had beguiled the men of that generation into their blind furious hatred of the Nazarene. It was the high priest who had virtually condemned Him to death. It was for making Himself "greater than the Temple" that He was hated and condemned. Could they, the converts who now worshipped Jesus as Lord and Christ, join in a worship conducted by those wicked priests, in a Temple which Jesus had abandoned and doomed? If,

above all, they were to detach themselves from that perverse generation, must they not detach themselves from the Temple and its services? These were natural and obvious questions, scruples, doubts; and therefore the fact is noted that the three thousand, not only listened to the teaching of the apostles, not only joined the Christian fellowship, not only addicted themselves to the breaking of the bread, but also observed the Hebrew times of prayer and frequented the dishonoured Sanctuary of the Jews. The gift of the Holy Ghost did not cancel the need of prayer; the communion from house to house did not cancel the need of public worship; and as the Temple was open to them, and the times of prayer were convenient, they still worshipped in the Temple at the sacred hours. They need break away from no good custom of their former lives. They were to detach themselves from that untoward generation, not by any affectation of singularity, nor by an ostentatious resignation of former habits of worship, but by the power and fervour of their new spiritual life.

Thus taught and disciplined in righteousness, the three thousand converts were soon one in heart and soul with the hundred and twenty who were in Christ before them; and in a few brief touches St. Luke describes the marvellous freshness, simplicity, and energy of the Church in these morning hours of her long day. In the concluding verses of this chapter, he is not describing—we must mark this—a single act or series of acts, but a gradual process which extended through many weeks and months, as indeed the Greek verbs he uses abundantly prove. We should translate “All who believed *were holding* (not *held*) all things in common . . . . *were selling* (not *sold*) their estates and goods . . . . and *were dividing* (not *divided*) them among all as each had need.” For thus we best convey the

impression that the Church was habitually occupied in acts of charity, self-sacrifice, piety, not strung up to a singular fervour and activity for a special occasion.

Ah, true Church! ah, happy time! That happy time may be ours, will be ours, so soon as we compose as true a Church. When once we are as earnestly bent on each other's welfare, as steadfastly addicted to Christian instruction, to the fellowship of the saints, to the breaking of the bread, to the times of prayer, we shall enter into the simplicity, and freedom, and gladness of early times, and draw to our communion those whose hearts the Lord has touched. We may well be "stung with compunction" as we compare ourselves even with those whose once "lawless hands" we have seen clasped in the bonds of a sacred and inviolable amity. We may well be animated by hope if, despite our manifold weaknesses and sins, we are nevertheless striving to breathe the spirit of love, the life of charity, into that which is formal and selfish and dead.

#### V.

##### THE COMMUNITY OF GOODS.

There is still a very general impression—impression rather than conviction or belief—that the primitive disciples, on embracing the Faith of Christ, sold what personal property they had, and threw the proceeds of the sale into the public stock—established, in fact, a perfect community of goods. There are still many who suppose that Communism was the social theory of the primitive Church, that it is the true social theory, and that, if we were only as wise and good as we ought to be, we should not scruple to adopt it. This impression is based on two passages of Scripture. In Acts ii. 44, 45, we read, "And all who believed were together, and were holding all things as common, and selling

their estates and possessions, and dividing them among all, as any one might have need." This brief statement is expanded and defined in Acts iv. 32, 34, 35, where we read, "The multitude of those that believed were of one heart and of one soul, and not even one of them was saying that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but all things were common among them. Neither was there any destitute person among them: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, selling them, were bringing the prices of the things sold, and were laying them at the feet of the apostles; and distribution was being made to each, as each had need." These passages seem, it must be confessed, to teach explicitly enough that a community of goods was established in the infant Church; that every member of the Church, whatever his social status or position, flung his whole wealth into the alms-basket; and that the apostles and deacons distributed from the basket to every man according to the number of mouths he had to feed.

Yet there are at least two plain considerations which may well make us pause before accepting its apparent meaning as its true meaning. So long as human life is bound by its present conditions, such an arrangement, even if possible, would not be desirable; such an arrangement, however desirable, would be utterly impossible.

1. *Such an arrangement, even if possible, would not have been desirable.* There were difficulties enough in the way of the primitive Church: it had no need to create them. And to start on the understanding that every disciple was to become dependent on a common fund—a fund which absorbed the possessions of the rich for the benefit of the poor—*would* have been to create difficulties many and insuperable: Even as it is, the Gospel does not favour the

rich ; in a certain sense it does favour the poor. Its main function is to throw open that spiritual and eternal world from the possession of which the more a man has of things seen and temporal the more likely he is to be debarred, while the less he has of present good the more likely he is to reach forth to the supreme good—the treasure which does not wax old, the joy that fadeth not away. To say to the rich, to *all* the rich, “You must sell all that you have and give to the poor :” what would that have been but to throw another stone of stumbling into a path already difficult with rocks of offence ? To say to the poor, “Come with us, and you shall live easily on the goods of the rich :” what would that have been but an invitation to the selfish lazy ne’er-do-wells, who, in all probability, were as plentiful then as now ? The broken merchant, the intemperate scribe, the unjust steward, the fugitive slave, wicked husbandmen, and foolish virgins, “every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented,” would have found no slight attractions in a Society whose members, however poor and indolent, were placed on a level with the most laborious, and took an equal share with the rich. They would have gravitated to the Church as to their natural centre. So long as the apostles lived to discern spirits and to expose hypocrisy the worst effects of such a system might have been staved off ; but, when they were called to the higher service in which they now rest, it must have become an open gateway for the most fatally corrupting influences. The opulent, the honourable, the learned, the noble would have been deterred from entering its communion ; the worthless, the lazy, the ignoble, the bankrupt would have crowded into its fellowship.

2. Happily, however, *such an arrangement, even had it been desirable, was utterly impossible.* There never can be perfect equality among men, whether in respect of capacity

or goods. One flower, though all are beautiful, is of a more gorgeous or delicate beauty than another, and sheds a sweeter odour on the air. One star, though all are glorious, differs from another star in lustre and glory. One would hardly care to have stars and flowers reduced to "a footing of perfect equality." Like flowers and stars and all other works of the Divine hand, men range along an infinite scale of worth and excellence. Brains, energy, character, must tell, and should tell. Expansive sympathies and genial graces must and should win sympathy and admiration. The vital earnest spirit, which breathes itself away in impassioned utterances, sounding the music to which the world keeps step, or which steadfastly bends great and varied capacities to a select and foreseen end, must command influence, if not success of ruder forms. The man who has the highest qualities has a right—and, if any right be divine, has a divine right—to the highest place. You cannot, do what you will, reduce him to the common level.

Nor will you find it possible to establish even pecuniary equality. While the social world and the things thereof go on in their accustomed order, the manufacturer must have a capital to embark in his business which his "hands" do not require; the farmer must have lands and stock which the hind would not know how to use, even if he had them. Uncertainties, changes which cannot be precalculated, enter into every lot in life. Disappointing undeserved failures, and successes equally unforeseen and undeserved, enter into every lot in life. To order the annual harvest and adjust the laws of commerce so as that every man should have exactly the same income, or an income exactly proportioned to the claims of those dependent on him,—to do this would take that Omniscience which has planned present inequalities, that Omnipotence which works out, and works through, the present diversities of human labour and reward.

If we apply these remarks to the primitive Church, the case comes out very clear. In that Church there were officers and men of the Roman Legions needing and receiving very different rates of pay. There were magistrates and scribes, fishermen and tentmakers, merchants and husbandmen, plebeians and patricians, landowners and labourers, even slave-holders and slaves. None of these were bidden to forsake their vocation. They were commanded to "abide" in it, but to abide in it henceforth "with God." Most of them were obedient to the command. Their ships and sailors had no special absolution from the dangers of the great deep. Their crops were not exempt from the perils which environ all harvests, nor from the commercial laws which affect their value. The blight did not spare their wheat, nor the murrain their cattle. Their "faith" was no sufficient substitute for capital. Their travellers were not always honest, nor their markets always good, nor their ventures always successful. The soldier, though a Christian, might still be stabbed by sword or spear; the slave still be bit and stung by the lash. The scribe could not always get a ready sale for his MSS., nor the labourer a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, nor his employer a fair day's work for a fair day's wage. The fisherman sometimes dragged an empty net, though the little ones at home were crying for food; and the tentmaker found a lot of unsound canvas on his hands, though he had not a *stater* in his purse. In short, it must have been as impossible to establish an equality of goods then as now,—as impossible as it was undesirable. The merchant must have had capital sunk which he could not realize; the farmer must have possessed lands which he could not sell; the centurion must have purchased his costly arms and uniforms, and spent in a day what would have kept one of the Legionaries or *Socii* for a month; the scribe must have had his store of costly vellum and costlier MSS. Tho

whole business of life would have been brought to a stand had the Church attempted to place all its members on a footing of equality, to establish what is commonly meant by the Community of Goods.

Even if we suppose the difficulty overgot, if we suppose that every member of the Church stripped himself of all he had to establish a common fund, we may be very sure that the dead level, the even surface thus produced, must soon have been broken up. Industry, capacity, foresight, compel a man to rise above the indolent and improvident. If all took a fresh start, and started equal, some would travel at a greater pace than others. If an uniform surface were produced, one would soon rise, another sink, and before very long all the old diversities of station and possession would be reproduced.

To all which it *may* be objected—the objection is often taken, “You are giving us only logical proof, not scriptural. You may have Reason on your side, but what is the good of that when Scripture is against you?” Now, it is hardly worth while to ask whether the plain dictate of Reason is not to be received even though it cross Scripture, since, as we hold, Reason and Inspiration, offspring of one Father, never do or can disagree. There is the less need to argue the question, as it may be proved from Scripture itself, first, that the Community of Goods did not obtain in the Apostolic Church *in general*; and then, that it did not exist even in the Church *at Jerusalem*.

3. *There was no Community of Goods in the Apostolic Church in general.* From the passages before us we learn that at one time the Christians in Jerusalem sold houses and lands to supply the needs of their poor. It is surely a somewhat curious gymnastic feat to fix one’s toe on this little bit of solid fact, and leap to the long conclusion that *all* the

churches in *all* the primitive times had *all* things in common. Were not this and similar feats often performed, it would be quite unnecessary to remark that, if we would form any accurate conception of the primitive Church, we must not be content with noting how a few disciples in one corner of the Building are occupied, and inferring that all their brethren are similarly engaged, nor even with watching what the whole assembly does on any single occasion, and arguing that they were always doing what we see them doing then. We must rather combine the several chambers and courts of the Building, collect the scattered features of the scene, gather into one the separated portions of the Apostolic plan.

Now, if we thus piece together the various notices of the social theory of the primitive Church which are scattered through the Apostolic Writings, we shall find abundant proof that its theory was not Communism. Probably there were not many wealthy men among the first converts to the Faith ; but there were a few, of noble name, who had much goods. In no single case were they commanded to renounce their rank, or to cast their wealth into the treasury of the Church. In some cases—and if there were only *one*, it would suffice for our argument—we know they retained their wealth and station. Cornelius, the Centurion of the Italian Band, a scion of one of the noblest and most ancient families of Rome, neither sold his commission nor renounced his ancestral name. Sergius Paulus remained governor of Cyprus after his profession of faith in Christ, receiving as governor the usual honours, civic and military, as also the usual large emoluments. In like manner, and with like results, Erastus remained quæstor of Corinth, the chief revenue officer of that opulent city. Lydia did not throw up her business as a dealer in the Tyrian purple ; nor Dionysius vacate his seat on the Areopagus. Philemon did not manumit his slaves ; and Simon Magus, after his baptism, offered a large sum of

“money” for the miraculous gifts, and must, therefore, have had money to offer. Yet all these were members of the primitive Apostolic Church; some of them were among its brightest ornaments.

So, again, if the Community of Goods existed in the Church—if even the *theory* of Communism were sanctioned by the Apostles—how comes it to pass that they never expound and enforce this theory in their Epistles? How is it that their Epistles almost invariably contain exhortations to the rich and to the poor, if none were rich or poor, but all equally dependent on a common fund? It is quite impossible to read the Apostolic Letters without perceiving that degrees of wealth and distinctions of rank obtained in the early Church; that some of the worst *abuses* of wealth even were not absent. St. James, for instance, writes thus:—“My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ with respect of persons. For if there come into your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say, ‘Sit thou here in a good place,’ and say to the poor, ‘Stand thou there,’ or ‘Sit here under my footstool:’ are ye not, then, partial in yourselves? Have ye not become judges of evil thoughts?” Now is it possible, is it so much as conceivable, that James could have written this description, if the Community of Goods had existed in the churches which were “scattered abroad”? if he had not seen rich brethren in goodly apparel sitting in high comfortable places, and poor men in vile raiment crouching on footstools or standing in out-of-the-way nooks and corners? There can be no doubt that this graphic picture, with its minute touches about gold rings, gay clothing, footstools, and reserved seats of honour, was taken from the life. Nor can there, in the face of such facts as these, be any doubt but that, in so far

at least as the *general* Apostolic Church is concerned, the popular belief in the Community of Goods is as contrary to Holy Writ as it is to human reason.

4. But we may go further, and argue that *there was no Community of Goods even in the Church at Jerusalem*. The passage before us seems, indeed, to imply that there was. But the first and most obvious canon of Interpretation is, that Scripture explains and limits Scripture; that we can draw no safe inference from any *single* passage, no safe inference on any subject till we have heard *all* that Scripture has to say about it. And there are several passages—several facts recorded in the Acts of the Apostles—which are quite at variance with the received opinion that all private property was thrown into the public stock. If in one passage we are told that “as many as were possessors of lands and houses were selling them, another passage, Acts xii. 12, tells us that, at a subsequent period, Mary, the mother of John Mark, still owned a house in Jerusalem, a house sufficiently commodious to receive all the disciples who met to pray for Peter’s delivery from prison. She, at all events, although a member of the Church at Jerusalem, did not sell her house, and bring the money and lay it at the Apostle’s feet.

That solemn history of Ananias and Sapphira points, too, in the same direction. The apostle Peter expressly affirms that Ananias need not have sold his land; that there was no compulsion, no rule, enjoining such a sale; and that, after the sale, the sum he received for it was entirely at his own disposal. “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? And after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” The sin of Ananias was, not that he loved an ancestral estate too well to part with it, but that he tried to seem more generous than he was, to *seem* more liberal and

munificent than others without really *being* so. This fatal hypocrisy was that "lying against the Holy Ghost" for which he fell, smitten by the incensed Heavens, at the Apostle's feet. If constraint had been laid upon him,—if by apostolic rule or social theory he had been compelled, against his will, to sell his patrimony,—we might have found some palliation of his guilt. But there being no rule, every man being left to do what was right in his own eyes, we can only confess it was meet that the first hypocrite who defiled the Church with his cunning glozing pretences of a saintliness beyond that of his brethren, should be made a standing warning to the thousands who have followed in his steps. But if Ananias was free, and Peter affirms that he was free, to sell his estate or not to sell it, to bring or not to bring its price to the Apostle's feet, it is quite evident that the apostles did not enjoin a Community of Goods on the Church at Jerusalem; while from the fact that Mary did not sell her house, it is equally evident that all the members of that Church did not practise it.

Equally decisive, as it appears to us, is that Minute of the Church at Jerusalem which records the election of Deacons,—men chosen for the express purpose of distributing alms to the needy. The Hellenists murmured because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. To stop their mouths, and that justice might be done, officers were appointed to be the almoners of the Church's bounty to the poor. In the Minute which records their election, there is not a word about a common stock for the support of the whole body of believers. The implication all through is, that there were rich believers who gave alms, and poor believers who received alms, and that the deacons were appointed simply to see that the poorest and most helpless were not overlooked.

Nor is it difficult to gather an argument or two from the

very passage commonly adduced in proof of the opinion that Communism was the social theory of the Primitive Church. In Acts iv. 32 we read, "Not even one of them was *saying* that aught of the things which he possessed was his own (οὐδὲ εἰς τι τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῶν ἔλεγεν ἰδίον εἶναι), but all things were common with them (ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά)." And no doubt these phrases do, at first sight, seem to imply a Community of Goods. But, as Bengel acutely remarks, though no member of the Church at Jerusalem cared to *say* that anything he possessed was his own, yet the very phrase implies that he still *had* possessions which he might have claimed as his own had he cared to do it: though all things were for a time common with them in so far as the *use* of the things was concerned, yet the phrase implies that "the *ownership* was not altogether abolished." Nor is it without significance, as Hackett observes, that the Greek verbs, rendered in our Version "said" and "sold," "bought" and "laid," would be more accurately rendered, "was saying," and "selling," "were bringing," and "laying." The prevalent tense of the passage indicates that the Sacred Historian is not describing a single act complete in itself, but a continuous and unfinished process; that he means to convey, not that all the members of the Church at once parted with all they had and became pensioners on a common fund, but that as occasion served, gradually, as fresh needs arose, each parted with house or property or land sooner than let his brother lack.

On the whole, then, we have Scripture warrant for detaching all Communistic theories from the Faith of Christ. Taking the passage in Acts iv. as a fragment of a book, not as complete in itself, interpreting and completing its meaning by the facts recorded in the context, we shall have no great difficulty in arriving at its sense. When we read,

“The multitude of those that believed were of one heart and of one soul, and not even one of them was saying that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but all things were common among them,” we shall understand that, immediately after the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, there rose in the Church a pure fervent charity, which, overcoming the selfishness natural to man, led the rich believer to regard himself as a steward for the poor, holding all he had, not for his own use only, but for the service of the Master, and, therefore, for the good of his brethren. When it is added, “As many as were possessors of lands or houses, selling them, were bringing the prices of the things sold, and were laying them at the apostles’ feet, and distribution was being made to each, as each had need,” we shall understand that a common chest was provided, from which all who had need were supplied: that, this fund being opened at a time when many had given up all to follow Christ, the wealthier disciples, sooner than see *them* destitute, parted, some with houses, some with lands, while all contributed from the earnings of their labour or the profits of their trade. To sum up all in one sentence, this passage describes, not the established social practice of the general Apostolic Church, but a temporary expedient adopted by one section of the Church to meet an extraordinary crisis. It lays down no rule, lends itself to no theory. It simply teaches that, if we have the true love of God and man, we shall not love one another in word only, neither in tongue, but prove the truth of our love in the deeds of a self-sacrificing charity.

## XIX.

*The Use of Leisure a Test of Character.*

ACTS iv. 23.

“STONE walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.” The free heart is still free though it lie caged within a prison; its thoughts have as wide a scope, its aims are as lofty, its songs as sweet as though it were at large. And, on the other hand, we may be, we often are, imprisoned and fettered, although no stone walls nor iron bars confine us. “Captives devoid of noble rage,” we may quite tamely submit to the loss of our freedom. Captives devoid of ignoble rage, we may wisely limit and circumscribe our freedom, and walk humbly within the bounds of law and duty.

We say nothing now of those grosser captivities to lust and passion into which we often sell ourselves for the sake of a passing indulgence, breaking for the instant all bonds of law, to find thereafter the whole power of our life lessened and its scope contracted. It is sad beyond all telling to think how many men, in sudden heats of youthful desire, have loaded themselves with fetters of which Death holds the only key. But we are not now to speak of these. There are other more innocent and more general captivities; there are limits within which we voluntarily and wisely restrict our natural freedom of thought and action, though even from these we now and then sigh for release. At times release is accorded us; we are set free to go where we will. And in

the use we make of our freedom there lies a subtle but singularly accurate test of character. We go where we would be ; the direction in which we travel affording no doubtful indication of the bias of our will, the mark at which we aim.

1. The natural freedom of human action is limited in many ways, by many causes ; but perhaps the most constant and effective of these limitations arise from that necessity of Labour under which we all lie. We must eat to live, and to eat we must work. Morning by morning we rise from our rest, and, instead of following our natural bent, instead of choosing the occupation of the day, we go forth, and are compelled to go forth, to a labour that is often irksome and distasteful to us. The sun with its clear shining may give promise of a lovely time ; the fields may be green with grass, or bright with flowers, or waving with a wealth of corn ; and the birds may sing songs of invitation from every spreading branch or bosky dell. We may think with an infinite longing of the cool breezes that play round the hill-top, or the dim fragrant coverts of the wood, or of pools and caverns by the sea all glowing with the clear rich tints of ulva and coralline, or of the bracing plunge through the climbing wave which would dissipate all the languors of our frame. But none the less we must turn down the accustomed dusty streets, and take our way to workshop or factory or counting-house, and toil through the heat of the day till evening calls us to brief repose. We cannot take our own way, or have our own will, or do the thing we would. The constraints of need are upon us. Our freedom is limited, if not wholly withdrawn, by the stern demands of labour. Liberty yields to duty, and, as though we were caged in with stone walls or iron bars, we have to move through a narrow prescribed round, and defer, however reluctantly, to the harsh commands of an authority we cannot resist. If we are of

a mutinous spirit, and will at all risks take our own way, the dark cell and sharp scourge of destitution soon correct our fault.

Is life worth having on these terms? That depends very much on the way in which we handle our conditions, or the temper we bring to the daily round and common task, on the attitude we assume toward the stern inexorable necessities by which we are shut in. For just as "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage," so also labour is not necessarily a confinement and a curse; it may be a culture and a blessing. We may be free even while we obey, and gain the true liberty by renouncing its counterfeits. And, on the other hand, we may hug our chains in the temper of a slave, or fret and gall ourselves against them in a criminal and rebellious temper.

There are men who, though not loving labour at the first any more than their neighbours, have come to love it either for its own sake or for the sake of its financial results. Their whole soul, "like the dyer's hand, has been subdued to that it wrought in." They have found their supreme good of life in the labour that tasks their strength, or in hoarding and counting over its gains. They have sunk from men into mere drudges toiling on beneath their growing pack, and have lost all love, if not all conception, of the true heritage and hope of man. And there are others who wilfully beat themselves against the bars of their cage, although they only bruise themselves thereby and make their captivity the more galling. They hate the daily task which nevertheless they have to do, and make it tenfold harder by taking it hardly. They sigh for leisure and wealth, not that they may use them wisely and be free to pursue the nobler ends of life, but that they may have their own way and do as they please. And as we "consider" either this class of men or that, we are often tempted to conclude,

“It surely had been better for these men that they had never been born!”—so miserable or so degraded is their life.

But there are still other, and, thank Heaven, many other men who have learned that rudimental paradox—to gain freedom by obedience, to conquer by submission. If they *must* live in a cage, and cannot help at times longing for the bright fields and ample sky to which they are native, they will at least make their cage cheerful with songs. They have discovered that their lot and labour are appointed them by a wise gracious God who loves them, and who is seeking by the very constraints of toil to train their faculties for higher service, to surround them with fences and safeguards against the evils which lurk in indolence and self-will, to prepare them by labour for rest, and by an earthly obedience for the large liberties of heaven: And because they trust his wisdom and goodness, they accept the limits appointed for them with a patient heart, and even cheerfully adopt the task He allots them. *They make his will their will; and, therefore, in doing his will, they do their own.* Thus they rise to the true freedom through a glad obedience, and God's statutes become their songs. The prison-house of Necessity is transformed into the home of their choice, and the home is not unfrequently transformed by the Divine Presence into a heaven.

Labour is one cause, then, and a very fertile cause of the restrictions within which we are confined. But there are other restrictions which, at least to some of us, are still harder to bear;—the restrictions, for instance, imposed by *Custom* and *Convention*. Not only are we compelled to tread a daily round of duties; we are also compelled to tread it at a regulated pace and with a prescribed bearing and manner. We are not allowed to dress as we will, nor to speak our thoughts in our own words, nor to allude to

certain facts which nevertheless are perfectly notorious, nor, in short, to go about either our pleasure or our business in the way most natural and convenient to us. Society has something to say to us on each of these points, and many more, and delivers her oracles with stinging emphasis. It is at our own proper peril that we live a simple natural life—fearing nothing, concealing nothing, reserving nothing, or that we violate a single conventional propriety of tone, dress, manner, speech. And for the most part we find ourselves more or less obliged to submit to the customs of our class, to give in our adhesion to the conventionalisms of social order. A new inroad is thus made on our natural freedom; fresh limits are set to the narrow space in which we move; other fetters are snapped on hand and foot.

In our earlier years, when restraint is peculiarly obnoxious to us, we often make a stand for liberty. “These conventionalisms,” we say, “are not of God, though perchance the ordinances of labour are. No moral duty binds us to observe them. Let us break these puny bonds in sunder, and cast away from us these slight yet galling cords.” And so we get up our little rebellion against the customs and manners of the world around us. The world—as it can well afford to do—takes our mutiny very calmly, and not ill-naturedly on the whole; but none the less we soon find ourselves beaten, subdued, bound.

One of the most sorrowful consequences of this general submission to conventionalism is, that it takes individuality, variety, picturesqueness out of our daily life. We all look very much alike; we all wear very much the same clothes and fall into the same habits: we all do the same things, at the same hours, in the same way. And a very sorrowful consequence of *that* is, that we do not know each other, as we might do, and should, if our life were more natural, individual, free. We walk side by side, we dwell in the

same house even, and yet we are mysteries to one another—problems unsolved and insoluble. Like Wordsworth's star, like Milton's soul, we "dwell apart." We have secret joys which kindle no responsive joys in the hearts of those who stand nearest to us, and secret shames which do not humble them. We may hide a lifelong sorrow under the decorous conventional robe, and unless some chance wind part the robe, our dearest lover shall not know it: or, like that mournful penitent King of Israel,\* we may wear "sackcloth *within* upon the flesh," but unless some new transcendent grief rend the outer garment which hides it, it will never be seen even by our most familiar friend. The young girl has a secret sorrow which her mother might assuage, but it will never be told her. The father has a hidden burden of care or grief or shame which his strong sons would cheerfully help him to bear; but, unless he break down into utter collapse, they will never have a glimpse of it. Thus we go up and down the crowded ways of life with veiled faces, passing each other very close, nay, often walking together arm-in-arm, yet after all seeing very little of each other, however curious or tender the eyes which seek to look beneath the veil.

We wear these conventional bonds, however, with a difference. Some men love them and hug them; and as the due reward of their pains they become fops, gossips, parasites, courtiers, rather than men. Others rebel against them, and are either worsted in the conflict, or become boors, misanthropes, outlaws, Bohemians. And still others conquer them by submitting to them, so far at least as they are innocuous. They master them, and are not mastered by them. They wear the prescribed dress, adopt the customary tone, go through the usual forms and courtesies, and

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\* 2 Kings, vi. 30.

yet remain natural, piquant, original. They recognize the beauty of social order and discover that many of the conventionalisms which they once thought fetters and restraints are really safeguards and defences. Thus they meet Society on pleasant terms, and, instead of launching into a petty irritating warfare, are at peace. They submit to conventions and yet rule them ; they obey Custom, and yet they are free, nay, are thereby free.

2. Now there are occasions on which we are released from our bonds. For the time we are "let go ;" we may, though still within certain limits, go where we will. And as in speaking of our captivities we did not dwell on the grosser or sadder bonds of human life, but only of those which are more innocent and general, let us still keep the same level, still make the common ground of life our haunt and theme. We are not to speak of the great crises, then, in which our fetters are violently broken asunder ; as, for example, when we change our country or continent, or inherit a large property, or make a sudden fortune, or are set free by the majesty of some transcendent grief, or are quickened to a larger spiritual life.

We are rather to speak of the deliverances which are more general and frequent.

Thus, for instance, if we go forth to labour in the morning, we come home for rest at night : and most of us have a few hours—would they were more !—which we can devote to other than our professional pursuits. We have worn the bonds of labour all the day ; we have been shut up within its walls and bars ; and now we are "let go ; for a little while at least we are free from *those* bonds. A brief space of time lies at our disposal. We can do with it what we please, and we have earned the right to take our pleasure. What shall we do with our evening ? Well, some of us will

practise music ; some will collect ferns, or moths, or beetles ; some will get a little fishing, if wind and water promise sport ; some will join in athletic games or exercises ; some will read and study, changing their labour, and so entering into rest ; some will talk with the wife and play with the children ; some will tend a garden or work at an invention, or help to keep things straight in the house, their labour now being pleasant to them because it is of their own choosing and has love for its motive and inspiration. In short, every man, like the released apostles, “being let go, will go to *his own*,”\* to the thing he loves, to that which he most cares to do.

And here we may find a very subtle and accurate criterion of character. In these moments, when the soul swings loose from its chains and goes whither it will, the direction in which it moves shews the flow of the current ; it indicates where for the time the chief attraction of the soul lies, what is its governing affection. If, for example, a man habitually spends his evenings in the tavern, indulging himself with richer food and more generous liquors than his wife and children ever taste, we have no difficulty, no hesitation, in setting him down for a selfish sot and sensualist. If another hurries through his scanty meal to devour books or take lessons, secured only at the cost of threadbare clothes and stinted appetites, we may very certainly conclude that an ardent desire for knowledge has been kindled in him which many waters will not quench. And the same principle holds as in these grosser and more obvious cases so also with those which are more delicate and refined. Learn how men spend their leisure hours, and you may quite accurately

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\* Acts iv. 23. “Being let go, they went to their own company.” The word “company” is inserted by our English translators, though it is not printed in italics. The Greek has simply *πρὸς τοὺς ἰδίους* i.e. “to their own.”

infer their ruling passion, the affection or desire which for the time is supreme.

But, now, to take a graver tone. Suppose that no one evening of the week is given to God and his service; suppose that of all these leisure hours absolutely none are devoted to prayer, or to study of the Inspired Word, or to acts of mercy and compassion:—What then? Are we to conclude that this delicate criterion, this accurate test, has suddenly failed us? Must we not sorrowfully conclude rather that the man who thus drops God and God's service out of his leisure, is, whatever he may think himself, no true servant of God? Ah, religion is no subordinate and occasional affection of the soul. It is the pervading and supreme affection. And if the week pass, and still this divine affection give no sign of its presence, must it not be because it is not there?

Suppose, again, that a man does give some portion of his leisure to the Divine service, but makes it as little as he can: suppose that he will take thought and make sacrifices to spend an evening with his friends, or to join a pleasant game, which he will not make to join the company of the faithful in the Father's house, or to visit the widow and the orphan in their affliction: suppose he has so many objects of interest and desire that he can hardly make room for the thought and service of God, and the study of the Word, and the prayers which feed the inward fires of the soul:—what can we say of *him*? Must we not say that he is in great peril of letting his true life slip; that, although he may still be ranked among the servants of Christ, he is nevertheless in imminent danger of losing his place?

Or take another application of our test. A good many of us contrive to secure an annual holiday at the autumn season of the year. We are "let go" from our accustomed duties. We travel into new scenes, haunting the mountain-

top or the shore of the sounding sea. We fling away from us the cords both of labour and conventionalism. We wear what we like, wander where we please, and sit loose to most of our usual habits. The sense of our unaccustomed liberty warms our very blood. We revel in our rare freedom. And wherever we go, we go each man "to his own"—to the place or people we like, to the form of exercise or the mode of rest in which we most take delight. We shout with rapture as the familiar mountain-peaks come into view, or as we plunge through the rough waves of the sea ; or we sit in placid content by babbling brooks, and on rustic stiles, and in fragrant woods whose edges are all alive with song. We are with "our own" at last, with the things, perhaps also—lucky fellows that we are!—with the persons, we love best. The delicious languors of repose after long wearying toil are welcome to us ; so, too, are the pure keen air and sweet water and springing turf of the hills. And if we are Christian in thought and feeling as well as in name, all these, and all other natural beauties about us, speak to us of the beauty and goodness of God ; our joy in rest speaks to us of the profounder rest of the soul, and our joy in exercise of a more arduous and happy service.

But if it should chance that so soon as we leave our work and home and Church, with their stringent yet most helpful restraints, we carefully discharge all trace of Christian thought and feeling from our hearts, all speech of Christian truth from our lips, and are even at pains to be rid of all signs of the Christian profession from our look and manner : if we assume strange freedoms of thought and word, and would rather be taken for men of the world than for servants of Christ,—a dismal affectation of which many examples are to be met where one would least expect them : how is it with us then ? Why then we are with "*our own*," but God is not there, nor Christ—the God whom we call "Our

Father," the Christ in whom we boast as our Saviour and Friend!

Must there not be something very wrong with us, some grave defect of faith or love, some secret dangerous insincerity even, if in our happiest moments we turn not to, but from, the Author of our happiness; if when we are most under the charm of natural beauty we draw away from Him who has made everything beautiful in its season; if when we are most free from our customary restraints, and our soul turns lightly on its centre, we do not instinctively bend toward Him whose service is the true freedom, and yield to the magnetic attractions of his love?

## XX.

## The Christian Name.

ACTS xi. 26.

*“Christianus mihi nomen est, Catholicus cognomen.”*

THE Syrian Antioch, standing on the left bank of the swift Orontes where the mountain chain of Lebanon is crossed by the mountain chain of Taurus, was beautiful for situation, the praise of the whole earth. Its noble scenery, its delicious climate, the quick wit and easy manners of its people, made it one of the favourite resorts of emperors and philosophers, the affluent and the minions of their luxury. Within a wall twelve miles in length, it held, in the first century of the Christian era, close upon a million inhabitants. Peopled mainly by Greeks and Jews, it was the seat of a Latin colony, and, under the Roman rule, it grew into a stately luxurious city; its harbours were crowded with the ships of all nations, its streets with the merchants of every race. It ranked as the third city of the Empire, only Rome and Alexandria taking precedence of it. It was familiarly known as the *Rome of the East*.

The persecution which arose on the death of Stephen drove many of the first believers in Christ to this stately populous city; and among them certain islanders of Cyprus, associated with certain inhabitants of the African Cyrene. Jews by blood or faith, they were, in all probability, Greeks

by birth ; \* and when they were come to Antioch, † “they spake to Greeks as well as to Jews, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.” Here, in Antioch, by the labours of these Greek islanders and African colonists, the Gospel first found its full scope and entered on its true mission ; for here it was first freely offered to men of every race, and began to gather them into a sacred unity. From the very beginning, indeed, the Apostles had been commissioned to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. St. Peter had been taught by special revelation to hold no man common or unclean. Nevertheless, during the ten years which had now elapsed since the ascension of Christ, no serious and organized endeavour had been made to extend the Church beyond the limits of the Synagogue, and to bring all kindreds within its pale. So that the middle wall of partition which had separated Jews from Gentiles for ages, and which had been allowed to stand untouched ten years after “the Saviour of all men” had pronounced its doom, was at last broken down, not by wise and strong Apostles, but by a few unknown islanders of the Mediterranean Sea. Once more weak things and foolish were preferred before noble things and mighty. Men unknown to fame, and not men whose praise is in all the Churches, were the first to discover the very spirit and genius of the Christian Faith, the first to learn and practise its catholic and all-surmounting charity.

When tidings of this unlooked-for and undesired development of the Faith reached the mother-church at Jerusalem, it acted with singular prudence. Doubtful as these Jewish believers may have been as to the wisdom or lawfulness of

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\* For Cyrene, though situated on the African coast, was a Greek city. This is the “*aromatic Cyrene*” of Catullus. † Acts xi. 19. 21.

the step their brethren had taken, they resolved to investigate before they condemned,—a justice not always to be had in the Church of later days. They sent Barnabas, himself a Levite of Cyprus, Jew by blood but Greek by birth, to examine what the men of Cyprus and Cyrene had done, and the grounds on which they had taken so unprecedented a course. Barnabas, a benevolent man and full of faith, recognizing the “grace of God” in the work achieved by his brethren, was glad, and exhorted them to persevere in it with full purpose of heart. Instead of seeking to check a movement which had originated with obscure and unauthorized men, he fostered it and endeavoured to guide it wisely. He went in quest of Saul of Tarsus, himself a recent convert to the Faith; and for a whole year these two great orators and organizers assembled with the first Gentile Church, heading the new movement and teaching much people.\*

It was in Antioch, and during the year in which Barnabas and Saul sojourned in it (A.D. 43), that the disciples of the Lord Jesus received the name by which they are universally known at this day: *The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*† Hitherto they had called themselves, as indeed they long continued to do, “saints,” “brethren,” “disciples,” “believers”; their enemies had denounced them as “Galileans,” or “the sect of the Nazarenes.” But the new name given them in Antioch prevailed over all other names—at once in the Gentile world, though not in the Church itself till the post-Apostolic age. Within twenty years from this date we find King Agrippa confessing, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a *Christian*,”‡ or protesting, if we accept the more modern translation of the sentence, “Lightly art thou persuading thyself that thou canst make me a Christian.” In his first Epistle, St. Peter

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\* Acts xi. 22-26.

† Acts xi. 26.

‡ Acts xxvi. 28.

refers familiarly to the name, "If any man suffer as a *Christian*, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God\* *in this name*." Before the close of the century, the cry "*Christiani ad leones*" had rung through the amphitheatres of the Empire;† nay, we are told that even in the earliest of the persecutions, the one question put to disciples haled before Roman magistrates was, "Art thou a *Christian*?"

Now it is curious to note that "this worthy Name by which we are called," dear to us and sacred though it be, has attracted very little attention. We doubt whether a single essay on its history and significance is to be found in English literature. If such an essay be extant, it has not been our good fortune to light upon it. Yet the fact that the historical origin of words and names illustrates their meaning has of late years been generally and emphatically recognized. Even those of us who have little culture, on due provocation call ourselves Aryans, Anglo-Saxons, Britons, Englishmen, and know that by each of these words there hangs a tale which throws light on our national character, language, and traditions. It might therefore have been expected that, as of all our titles we prize that of "*Christian*," most, as moreover we cannot doubt that the origin and genesis of the title must put shades of meaning into it which it would be well for us to distinguish, no effort would have been spared to trace and define it; that we should not now have been left to ask for ourselves, (1) Whence did the Name come? (2) What does it mean? and (3) What is the special significance imported into it by the time, place, circumstances in which it originated? As, however, the task has been left to us, as, to the best of our

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\* 1 Peter, iv. 16.

† So also in Tacitus (Ann. xv. 44) we read "*vulgus Christianos appellabat*."

knowledge and belief, no answer has been given to these questions which is at once popular and precise, and still less any that is learned and exhaustive, let us try to answer them as best we may.

The extreme difficulty of arriving at any accurate and thorough answer to them impresses us at the very outset of our task. For, obviously, we must look mainly to the Scriptures of the New Testament for guidance; and, quite as obviously, the New Testament furnishes us only with slight hints and slender clues. Familiar as the word "Christian" is to our lips, it occurs in the New Testament only three times, only in the three passages already cited from the Epistle of St. Peter, from the confession or protest of King Agrippa, and from St. Luke's account of the founding of the Church at Antioch; and of these only the last will yield much assistance to our inquiry. Nevertheless, if we piece together the hints of Scripture and the historical facts which confirm and explain them, we may evolve from them a tolerably clear and accurate reply to each of our three questions.

## I.

*Whence did the Christian Name come?* Who invented and applied it? If no authoritative, no infallible, answer can be given to this question, it is at least possible to give it an answer of a high degree of probability, and such as no scholar will be likely to dispute.

And, first, it is not probable that this Name was assumed by the disciples of the Lord Jesus, either on their own motion or by Divine direction. The words, "And the disciples *were called* Christians first in Antioch," if they imply anything as to the origin of the Name, imply that it was given to them from without; that they did not invent it for themselves, but received it from their neighbours.

This implication is confirmed by the curious fact already mentioned, that for many years after the disciples were called Christians by their neighbours, they themselves did not adopt the name. In no single instance of which we have any record did the Apostles, to the end of their lives, address an epistle or harangue to the "Christians" in this city or that. To the last they addressed themselves to "the brethren" or "the saints," and speak of "disciples" and "believers."\* In the Acts, indeed, King Agrippa uses the word; but Agrippa was not a believer, and therefore his use of it proves nothing as to the usage of the Church. St. Peter, too, speaks of believers suffering "as Christians;" but the context shews that he is using, not their language, but that of those who reviled them. What his words really mean is, "Let not the *heathen* call you 'thief' or 'murderer,' but if they call you 'Christian,' reviling you for Christ's sake, do not be ashamed of that; but rather rejoice, glorifying God that you are counted worthy to bear this honourable name." In short, there is no proof that the Church itself ever adopted this title till the beginning of the second century. But had they invented the Name themselves, or had it been given them by Divine direction, would not the early believers have claimed and used it on all occasions? The fact that, so far as we know, they never employed it, goes far to prove that it did not originate within the Church.

To this conclusion only two objections are taken. It is objected, first, that so inoffensive, nay, so honourable, an appellation would not have been conferred on the disciples by their enemies. *They* would have invented a more opprobrious name, a name expressive of scorn and shame.

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\* Nor is the name to be found in the Epistle addressed to the Corinthians by Clement of Rome, the first of the Apostolic Fathers.

The objection shews a plentiful lack of "historical imagination;" no one acquainted with that age and able to picture it to himself would find any force in it. The citizens of Antioch would not hold Christ in any esteem, nor think it an honour to bear his name. They would see in Him nothing but a notorious criminal, who had expiated a guilty life by an infamous death. Had they wished to express contempt for his disciples, how could they have expressed it more curtly and effectually than by calling them "Christians," that is, followers of a Jew who had been put to death on a cross?

A second objection turns on a point of criticism. The Greek verb which we render by "*they were called*" in the sentence, "They were called Christians first in Antioch," has more senses than one. At times it undoubtedly means "to appoint or nominate by Divine direction." "If, therefore," argues Dr. Clarke, "the name was given by Divine appointment, the name Christian is from God," not from man.\* And, of course, *if* the name were of Divine appointment, it *was*, and is, of God; but that "if" is precisely the matter in dispute. Happily it is a point which even those who have no knowledge of Greek may decide for themselves.

The Greek verb in question (*χρηματίζειν*) meant originally "to traffic, to do business," and it is easy to see how the original meaning of it would come to be modified in two ways. First, among the Greeks, as once in England, men were named from their respective occupations, as, for instance, Philip, the Armourer, Philip, the Sandal-maker, Philip, the Poet; just as when we say, "John Carpenter,"

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\* The point could hardly be worth arguing, were it not that the opinions of Benson, Doddridge, and many minor commentators, agree with that of Dr. Clarke.

our forefathers used to say, "John, the Carpenter;" or when we say, "John Butler," they used to say, "John, the Butler;" or when we say, "John Smith," they used to say, "John, the Smith." Their trades were their *callings* or *vocations*, that after which they were called or named. Because men were named from their occupations the verb which once meant "to do business" came to mean "to name" or "to call," and was used in such sentences as these, "He shall be *called* great," "She shall be *called* an adulteress."

The meaning of the word was modified in another way equally obvious. For a king's "business" is to give orders, judgments, directions; a god's "business" is to rule, to decree, to ordain. Hence, when the word was used of kings or gods, its original meaning of doing business was modified in a new direction: it was taken as signifying "to judge, to order, to appoint, to ordain, to decree." Plainly enough, therefore, and by such obvious changes as all our common words undergo, out of the original use of this verb there grew up two different senses: sometimes it meant "to ordain or nominate by Divine direction," and sometimes it meant simply "to name or call." The question is, of course, In which of these two senses is the verb used here? If the name of God were in the sentence, the verb would no doubt imply that "Christian" was a title conferred on the disciples by the Divine Being. But the Sacred Name is not in the sentence; we have no right to import it into the sentence: we can only fall back on the simpler and more common use of the verb, and conclude that the disciples were called or named "Christians" by their neighbours of Antioch. And this conclusion is put beyond doubt by the fact that the disciples, for more than half a century, did not adopt the Name. Had they held that it came from God, we may be sure that they would have worn it proudly, that the

Apostles would have habitually employed it, and that it would have been the most common and familiar of names in the Church itself. If the verb in dispute mean anything more than "named" or "called," it can only be this, that Christians are men who make Christ and the affairs of his kingdom, as indeed they ought to do, the *daily business* of their lives, their *calling*, their *vocation*.

We may conclude, then, that the Christian Name was invented and applied to the disciples by the citizens of Antioch. But by which class of them: the Jews, the Greeks, or the Romans? Certainly not by the Jews. *They* would never have coined an appellation so honourable; for "Christian" is from "Christ," and "Christ" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Messiah." For the Jews to have called the disciples *Christ-ians* would have been to admit that Jesus of Nazareth, whom the disciples worshipped, was the true Christ, the true Messiah, the Anointed One of God,—an admission to which the Jews would have preferred death. *Galileans*, or more commonly *Nazarenes*, was their name for the followers of Jesus, Galilee being the most abandoned province of Judea, and Nazareth the most abandoned village of Galilee. "Nazarenes" is the name by which Christians are known in the Talmud; the Arabs call us *Nazzari* to this day, and the modern Jews term us *Goiim* (that is, *heathen*), at least in their private intercourse with each other.

If, then, God did not ordain this Name, if neither Jews nor Christians invented it, it could only have come from the heathen races dwelling in Antioch. A more probable origin for it could hardly be conceived. For the Gentiles of Antioch could not confound the disciples of Jesus with the Jews, as the Roman people long did, since the Jews disavowed them; and here, at Antioch, not Jews only, but Greeks, were added to the Church. The labours of the

Cypriots and Cyrenians in this city mark the commencement of a new historical era. So many Gentiles were now gathered into the Church, that its distinctive claims were forced upon the public attention. The Gentiles of Antioch saw, and saw with no small surprise, that those whom they had hitherto regarded as an obscure Jewish sect, were hated and renounced by the Jews, and were uniting in their fellowship with men of every race. And these Antiochenes, as we learn from secular history, were of a lively and wicked wit, very free in their speech, full of quips and jests, and sarcasms, and wonderfully apt in inventing names and nicknames. More than once they pitted their sarcastic wits against the mighty Imperator himself, and were thought to have had the best of the conflict; more than once their wicked tongues set the whole city in an uproar, and kindled a fire which could only be quenched in blood. A people of so keen and lively a wit were the very people to find a new name for the disciples. When they found that the followers of Jesus could no longer be confounded with the Jews, they would be on the watch for some distinctive mark, some peculiarity of opinion, or manner, or speech, out of which they might coin a distinctive appellation for them. Hebrew names, such as Nazarenes or Galileans, would have little force for Greeks or Romans; for what did *they* know or care about the petty provinces and villages of Judea? "Disciples," "believers," were titles too general or too complimentary for their tongues; nor would *they* hear much of such names as these, which were common only *within* the Church. The one thing they *would* hear, both from the disciples themselves and from those who hated them, was the name of Christ. From the Jews they would hear, "These men accept Jesus, the Nazarene, as *the Christ*." From Gentiles who had any knowledge of the subject they would hear, "These men have no God but *Christ*." While

from the disciples themselves they would constantly hear the name of *Christ* in their discourses, their hymns, their prayers. About the first description we have of the disciples from any heathen source depicts them as men of an inoffensive life, who met on the first day of the week "to sing hymns to Christ." \* This incessant homage to Christ was the most marked distinction of the disciples, as it was also the very spring of their life. Nothing, therefore, can be more probable than that the Gentiles of Antioch, wanting a new distinctive name for them, should seize upon that which was most characteristic in their language and worship, and call them *Christ's men*, or *Christians*.

The leading Gentile races of Antioch were the Greeks and the Romans. Can we, to carry our enquiry to its ultimate point, determine with which of these the Christian Name had its origin ? The question is a curious one, and in some sense of no moment whatever. For in all social and literary respects the Romans and the Greeks were now one people. If from the political point of view the Romans had conquered the Greeks, Greece had avenged its defeat by giving them models and masters in all that pertained to mental culture, moral speculation, and social life. In their view of the Church, Greek and Roman would be at one ; both would treat it with the same light scorn, in so far as it represented a system of thought and morals ; both would confront it with an equal hostility so soon as it interfered with social comfort or the public interest. And, therefore, whether the Name came from the Romans or the Greeks, it would express the same conception. Still, our interest in this Name is so great that we search eagerly for any light that may be thrown upon its genesis or history ; and the word itself, if

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\* See Letter of Pliny the Younger (A.D. 100) to the Emperor Trajan ; "*carmenque Christo, quasi Deo, dicere secum invicem.*"

we closely examine it, yields some light. It is, indeed, one of the most remarkable words in the human vocabulary. *Christian* (χριστιανός) is the Greek form of a Hebrew title with a Latin termination. Just as the superscription suspended from the cross of our Lord, "This is the King of the Jews," was written in Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, so, also, all three languages contribute to the Name by which the disciples of Christ are known throughout the world. "Christ" is Greek for the Hebrew "Messiah;" and to this Greek word a Latin termination is appended in order to form the Name by which his followers were first called in Antioch. "Christian" follows the rule by which the party and political names of Rome were formed: "Christians" from "Christ," as "Herodians" from "Herod," "Pompeians" from "Pompey," "Cæsarians" from "Cæsar."\* And, therefore, there can be little doubt that the name came originally from the Latin or official quarter of Antioch.

This much, then, may be taken as tolerably certain: that the name "Christian" did not come from God, at least by direct inspiration or appointment; that it did not arise within the Church, but outside it; and that it is not of Jewish coinage: but that it did come from the Roman or Romanized citizens of Antioch, and that, as the Romans were then and there wholly under the influence of Greek culture, it carries in it an historical meaning which is to be interpreted by Greek and Roman habits of thought.

## II.

What these habits were, in so far as they bear on our present theme, must now be briefly indicated, that we may

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\* To the Antiochenes, who did not know the dogmatic and religious import of χριστός, it would seem a *nomen proprium* from which a party name might well be formed.

arrive at the meaning of "that worthy name," by which we are called.

For all purposes of culture Antioch was, as has already been said, a Greek city. Even the Jews who resided in it were *Hellenists*, i.e., Jews who worshipped God in the Greek language, and read their Scriptures in the light of the Greek philosophy. The Romans who dwelt in it, like the Romans everywhere, took their education, their art, their metaphysics, and their morals, from the Greek schools. In Antioch, therefore, there were disciples of almost all the great masters of Grecian thought. These disciples were commonly called by their master's name: the Pythagoreans, for example, took their name from Pythagoras; the Aristotelians from Aristotle; the Platonists from Plato; the Epicureans from Epicurus. Hence it was very natural that the disciples of Christ should be called *Christ's men*, or Christians, in Antioch. Here, first, they carried the Gospel to the Greeks. Hitherto, they had confined their labour to Jews and proselytes; now they turned to the Gentiles. Among the Jews the various schools and sects were not, as a rule,\* named after their founders and teachers, but after the tenets they held or the mode of life they professed. So long as the disciples of Jesus remained in Judea, where schools of thought were not named after their founders, they were simply called "saints," "believers," "brethren," etc.: it was only when they came to Antioch, and drew many Greeks into the Church, that, according to the Greek custom, they received the name of their Founder and Teacher. "Christian," like Platonist or Pythagorean, was a useful distinctive title, a good travelling designation. It meant little or much, praise

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\* The only probable exception was that of the Sadducees, who are said to have taken their designation from *Zadok*, their teacher and founder; even this, however, is a very doubtful derivation.

or blame, according to the lips from which it fell. It did not necessarily imply contempt, nor was it necessarily eulogistic. And if any of the Antiochenes used it contemptuously, as implying that the disciples had for their Master no accomplished scholar, no honoured sage, but only a crucified slave, the saints, we may be sure, would not shrink from identifying themselves with Him whom they held to be the Great Teacher, and the only Saviour of the world, nor fail to glory in the shame of his cross.

But as a rule, probably, on Greek lips the word would only imply that the disciples of Christ held to Him a relation like that of the Greek youth to the various sages and philosophers of Greece. It would imply that as the Pythagoreans, Platonists, Epicureans, each bore the name of their master, because *they accepted what he taught and adopted his rule of life*, so also those who bore the name of Christ believed what He taught and followed the rule of life laid down by Him.

Attracted by the fame of this great teacher or that, the studious youth of Greece enrolled themselves on the list of his disciples, and listened in porch, academy, or grove to his discourses on truth and morality. They followed him through the streets of the city, in the hope that some casual encounter would give rise to a discussion from which they might learn wisdom or acquire dexterity in "the nice conduct" of the logical strife. They threw themselves passionately into his theory, and maintained it against all comers. And these disciples of the Greek schools are, in some sort, set before us as our models by the very Name we bear. For whatever else or more He is—and He is much more—Christ is also "a Teacher sent from God," a Teacher who taught, and lived, and was "the truth." The grace of his lips, the vital freshness and power of his doctrine, drew many to his feet. Those who believed on Him forsook all to follow Him,

to listen to his words, to gather up his wisdom, to teach and defend his doctrine. Because they received his words and confessed Him for their Master, they bore his name. But they did more than listen to Him. They took Him for their Exemplar, and adopted his mode of life. Epicurus had denied the immortality of the soul, and had placed "the chief good" in a wise use and a wise enjoyment of the present life; and his disciples caught the spirit of his teaching, often degraded and caricatured it, and lived easy pleasurable lives. Zeno taught men to discipline and rule their cravings, to make themselves independent of outward conditions, to aim at inward composure and tranquillity, to meet vicissitudes as those who, in bearing all, bear nothing, to free themselves from fear, and care, and the stings of unsatisfied desire; and his disciples, the true Stoics, those whose philosophy did not, according to the bitter gibe of Epictetus,\* consist in a beard and a cloak, trained themselves to despise wealth, rank, power, and sensuous indulgences, to blend plain living with high thinking, to lead simple, hardy, meditative lives. And Christ has taught us to put our trust in the Divine Father who careth for us, and for all, to find our happiness in being good and doing good, to deny ourselves that we may serve others, to live in and for that unseen eternal world into which we must soon pass rather than for the visible mutable world which is but a lovely, various,

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\* St. Chrysostom takes up this gibe of Epictetus, and improves upon it. (Hom. xvii. ad Pop. Antioch: sec. 2.) When Antioch was trembling under the hot displeasure of the Emperor Theodosius, the Christian monks poured in from the desert to stand by and console the trembling citizens. But, asks the eloquent presbyter, "where now are *the men that go about in cloaks, with their long beards, and big clubs in their right hands*—the philosophers of the Gentiles? They have all left the city; they vanished; they hid themselves in caves: while those only who, according to truth, placed their philosophy in action, shewed themselves fearlessly in the forum, as if no misfortune had befallen the place."

and perishable "phenomenon" of "the things which do not appear." If we are his disciples indeed, we heartily believe what He taught; we also adopt and follow his rule of life; for whatever He taught in words He incarnated in the loveliness of perfect deeds; whatever He bids us do, He Himself did, and will help us to do. We are unworthy of the Christian Name, unless we thus believe what our Master taught and follow the example He set. Better never to have been "named with the Name of Christ" than not to have departed from the iniquity He hated, and not to pursue the holiness in which He was perfect.

This is the lesson which fell, with the Christian Name, from the *Greek* lips of Antioch. But from *Roman* lips that sacred Name suggests another yet a kindred lesson. To the Greeks the name, "Christian," would probably mean mainly *a disciple* of Christ; to the Romans it would mainly mean *a partizan* of Christ. They would think of the Christians as men who bore to Christ a relation similar to that which the Pompeians bore to Pompey, or the Cæsarians to Cæsar.\* Whenever the State was disturbed by factions, every Roman who took part in political affairs, as almost all Romans did, had to determine with which of them he would side. He had to weigh the claims of a Pompey, a Cicero, a Brutus, against those of Cæsar, to acquaint himself with their several lines of policy, and to decide which of them promised best either for his personal ambition or for the public good. When once he had espoused his cause or faction, he had to stake all, even life itself, on its success—civil strife being, then as now, of all strifes the most bitter and venomous.

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\* This tendency to regard every new religious sect in its political aspects and as, in all probability, a danger to the State, comes out in Pilate's treatment of our Lord, and on most of the occasions recorded in the Acts of the Apostles in which the Christians came into contact with the Roman "colonies" and their magistrates.

Nothing short of an entire and passionate devotion to his chief was likely to win recognition or reward; nothing short of victory was likely to avert ruin or death. He was one who could say,—

“What is it that you would impart to me?  
If it be aught toward the general good,  
Set honour in the one eye and death i' the other,  
And I will look on both indifferently;  
For let the gods so speed me as I love  
The name of honour more than I fear death.”

He was one who could add,—

“Be *factions* for redress of all these griefs,  
And I will set this foot of mine as far  
As who goes farthest.”

To the Romans, therefore, it was natural to regard Christ as a political leader or conspirator, and the Christians as a political faction demanding another king than Cæsar. It was only his claim to be a king with which Pilate, or any other Roman functionary, would concern himself; it was only for their contumacy to the Emperor that the early Christians were hunted to death.

Nor was their conception of the Christian life, imperfect as it was, altogether inaccurate. For if we are Christians indeed, we *are* the partizans of Christ. We have looked out on the warring spiritual forces of the kingdom of this world. We have considered the great conflict between evil and good, between light and darkness, which is being waged all around us. We have weighed the claims of the rival chiefs—the claims of the world, the flesh, and the devil against the claims of Christ. We have determined which cause it will be best for us, and best for the world, that we should espouse. *We are Christ's men.* We follow his standard. We devote ourselves to his service. We stake our all on his success.

Heart and soul, we are *his*, his alone. We can keep no terms, we can admit no truce, with the faction of darkness. We hold as traitors any affections in ourselves which are unfaithful to Him. For us, Christ is the vital and personal centre of the universe. Our only peace, our only blessedness, is in a vital, constant, and growing union with Him. To serve Him, to contribute to the interests of his kingdom, is our *calling*, our *vocation*, our *daily business*: it is the very meaning of the sacred Name we bear, and are proud to bear. Only as we live in Christ, and for Christ, do we prove ourselves Christ's men or shew ourselves worthy of the Christian Name. *He* has claims on us incomparably greater than those of any patriot on the citizens of Rome; for He is seeking not his own aggrandizement but to make us great. He who asks us to live for Him has died for us. He calls us to share his toils and perils that, suffering with Him, we may also be glorified with Him. If He would reign, it is that He may serve. He would have all men flock to Him, but it is that He may bless them all and do them good. Wisdom sits smiling on his lips; healing and invigorating virtue flows from the hand He lifts in benediction on the world; victory crowns the head once pierced with thorns. And, therefore, we are *His—disciples* who sit at his feet and take a law from his mouth, *partizans* to whom his cause is dearer than life. This, at least, is the ideal we set before us. In so far as we fall short of it we are, and we confess that we are, unworthy of the memories and prophecies of the Christian Name, unworthy at once of our name, our history, and our fellowship. Docility and zeal—the docility of the Greek disciple, the zeal of a Roman partizan—these at least should be ours if we profess and call ourselves Christ's men.

### III.

*What is the special significance imported into the Christian*

*Name by the time, place, and circumstances of its historical origin?* There is, as we have seen, good reason to believe that ~~this~~ Name was not given to the disciples by the immediate direction or inspiration of God. Nevertheless, we who confess that all things are of God, who admit that his providence rules the fall of a sparrow no less than the death of a king, and numbers the hairs of our heads as well as the years of our lives, are not disposed to deny that it was by his ordinance the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. He who appoints to every race its "epoch of development,"\* did not He ordain that new development of the Christian Faith of which Antioch was the scene? He who calls the very stars by their names, had He no voice in naming his redeemed? He who rules in the thoughts of all men, and makes them wiser than they know, did not He rule in the thoughts of the Gentiles in Antioch, and lead them to coin a word of whose full force and beauty and significance they were unconscious? We cannot doubt it. We cannot doubt that we are bound to look for a Divine intention and meaning in the Name as well as for a human intention and meaning.

Now there are at least two directions in which our quest will be rewarded. First, it is very natural that we should ask why the official was preferred to the personal name of our Lord. Why are we named after *Christ* instead of after *Jesus*? And, no doubt, the historical, the human, answer to this question is, that while "Jesus" is perhaps *our* most customary name for the Lord, "Christ" was more commonly used by the primitive disciples. To them "Jesus" was simply a proper name, just as John, or Samuel, or George is with us. But "Christ" was a religious title; it designated Him whom God had "anointed" to be the true King of Men. To call Jesus "Christ" was to affirm that *He* had

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\* Acts xvii. 26.

come for whom the world had waited, and yearned, and travailed—the Hope and Consolation of Israel, the Desire of all nations. And as the primitive disciples lived to make this affirmation, as to make it was their distinctive task and labour, it is no wonder that, whether in their writings, their speech, or their worship, *Christ* was the name by which they most commonly designated the Lord from heaven. Naturally, therefore, the Gentiles of Antioch, when they wanted a distinctive name for the disciples, would seize on that which they most frequently heard, and call them after “Christ” rather than after “Jesus.”

This is the human or historical motive for the preference. But what was the Divine motive? An ignorant and eccentric preacher once replied to that question, “We are called after *Christ*, not after *Jesus*, because the Lord did not desire that His people should be called *Jesuits*.” To him “the Society of Jesus” was the incarnation and epitome of all that was subtle, malevolent, unrighteous; and because the *Jesus-ites* or Jesuits were an evil race, therefore the disciples, fifteen hundred years before that Society was formed, had not been permitted to assume a name so contaminated! If we look at the meaning of the two names, however, we may find a more rational answer to the question. “Jesus” means “a Saviour;” “He shall be called *Jesus*, because *He shall save* his people from their sins.” “Christ” means “the Anointed One.” And, therefore, we may conclude that, if there be a Divine intention in the choice of one name rather than the other, it is this: that while we are not, and cannot be, fellow-saviours with the Lord, we can and do share his anointing. He was “anointed with the Holy Ghost,” and therefore “with power.” And we, if we are truly Christian, “have *an unction* from the Holy One;” for no man can confess with the heart that Jesus is the Christ of God, save by the Holy Ghost. We cannot *save* men; we can only

carry them tidings of the salvation which our Master wrought once for all; but we may have that inward spiritual consecration, that power of an endless life, in virtue of which Christ was the prophet, and priest, and king of men. By virtue of his Spirit dwelling in us, *we* may become, we ought to be, prophets teaching his truth, priests presenting his sacrifice, kings who rule in his special domain—the domain of the conscience and the heart. Of course the men of Antioch had no thought of any such meaning when they called the disciples “Christians;” they simply took up the name that was oftenest in their ears. But under the guidance of God men are often wiser than they know, and say more than they mean; and we at least, who bare the Name they gave, are bound to live in the spirit of our name. It has not wrought its proper and due effect upon us, unless we hold ourselves to be *anointed* of God, anointed with the Holy Ghost; consecrated, by a Divine character, to a Divine ministry. Because we are *Christ-ians* we should be in the world as Christ was in the world—in it, but not of it. Because we are Christians we, like Christ, should be “anointed with the oil of joy above our fellows,” meeting all changes of fortune with a cheerful tranquillity, learning obedience and being made perfect by the things which we suffer, and, therefore, taking them joyfully; dwelling in a peace so pure and profound, so far beyond the reach of time and change, that, out of the abundance of our rest, we may promise rest to the weary and the heavy laden.

Another line of thought by which we may reach the Divine intention and significance of our Name is suggested by the question: Why were the disciples called Christians first *in Antioch*? why *there*, and not elsewhere? And to this question there is but one answer. The Church of Antioch had one very special and significant feature, and

was the *first* Church in which it was developed. It was the only Church, the only society of any kind throughout the world, in which Hebrew and Greek, Roman and Syrian, European and Oriental were bound together in the bonds of a common brotherhood. *It was the first Church*, the only Church then, *in which the catholic all-embracing charity of the Lord Jesus Christ found scope and expression.* Despite the breadth of the Apostolic commission, despite the special revelation made to St. Peter, that, “*in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable to Him,*” the Church had for ten years confined its labours to Jews and proselytes. The very waters of life had as yet created no green and fruitful oasis to which travellers of every clime might repair, and in which they might dwell together in the happy degrees of charity. In all the world except at Antioch, in all Antioch except the Church of Antioch, there was hostility, secret or open, between race and race, between the men whom God had made of “one blood.” The Hebrews thought all men but themselves to be “uncircumcised sinners.” The Greeks held all but Greeks to be “barbarians.” The Romans called all but Romans “enemies.” In cities such as Antioch, where Romans, and Greeks, and Jews dwelt side by side, and mingled in the markets, the baths, the schools, each held itself to be the superior race, and looked down on its neighbour with lofty scorn; feuds and tumults were of incessant occurrence: even a large military force could not always coerce them to peace, or keep them from flying at each other’s throats.

Both Jew and Gentile had, indeed, risen to some conception of the unity of the human race, and in their respective literatures we find the noblest expression of it; but neither Gentile nor Jew made any steadfast endeavour to live with each other and with all men on equal and fraternal terms.

The constant dream of the Hebrew prophets\* was of a golden age, in which *all* nations should flow into the House of the Lord, of a happy time in which all races, with their garlands and singing-robcs about them, should flock to the Temple of Jehovah with the song on their lips,—

“Let Him teach us out of his ways,  
And we will walk in his paths ;”

when, because Jehovah judged between the nations and arbitrated between the races, they should forge their swords into coulters and their spears into pruning-hooks ; nation should no longer make war with nation, neither should they drill themselves for war any more. But these golden visions of peace had no practical effect on the men who gloried in them. Then, as now, the Jews were the most separate and exclusive of races. They held themselves to be a peculiar people, the royal strain of the human race, and looked with scorn rather than pity on all other men as “mere sinners of the Gentiles.” Even with the life of Christ before them, and the grace of Christ in their hearts, inspired Jewish Apostles could very hardly be persuaded to offer the Gospel to every creature.

Nor were the Gentiles behind the Jews in giving expression to the noblest sentiments of humanity and universal goodwill. Such expressions abound in the pages of the moralists and poets of the Roman Empire, who flourished from a hundred years B.C. to a hundred years A.C. In the most unequivocal manner they affirmed the fraternity of mankind, and enforced the duty of charity to the whole human race (*caritas generis humani*). “Men,” said Cicero, “were born for men, that each should assist the rest.”

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\* See, for instance, Isaiah ii., 1—5, and Micah iv., 1—3 ; both of whom probably quote an elder prophet than themselves.

And again, "Nature ordains that a man should wish the good of every man, whoever he may be, for this simple reason, that he is a man." When this great Roman orator, quoting a Roman poet's (Terence's) translation of a Greek sage's (Menander's) aphorism, declaimed the famous verse, "I am a man, and therefore nothing human is alien to me," his vast audience broke into a rapture of applause. Nor do even the Hebrew prophets look forward with more enthusiasm than certain of the Latin poets to the golden age, when "the human race will cast aside its weapons, and when all nations will learn to love."\* Yet the very men who uttered or applauded these sentences would leave the forum or the theatre to engage in the bloodiest wars, or to torture a slave, even though he were also a philosopher or a poet,† or to glut their eyes with the agonies of gladiators butchered in the arena to make a Roman holiday. While with the tongue they so eloquently proclaimed the brotherhood of all men and the duty of charity to all, there was no man, and no race, whom they would not willingly destroy to gratify their ambition, to pamper their lusts, or to give zest to their sport.

To Jew and Gentile the unity of the human race, the sacredness of man, the duty of loving a neighbour as themselves, were mere themes for eloquent declamation; no sane man was expected to rule his social or political life by such thin abstractions. Only Christ, the Man who loved all men, as well as taught men to love one another, ever really persuaded them to hold each other as brethren, and to *shew* "charity to the human race" as well as to talk about it. He *was* love, love incarnate. There was not a single

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\* Lucan, "Pharsalia," vi.

† Witness the treatment of Epictetus by Epaphroditus, the favourite of Nero, as related by Origen: "Cont. Celsus," lib. vii.

man on earth, however base, or ignorant, or depraved, whom He did not love better than his life, and for whom He did not lay down his life. It was his pure and immeasurable love for us all which first really taught men to love one another, and to exhibit their love not in chiming verse alone, or in the climaxes of rhetoric, or in sighs for a golden age of peace, but in a thousand acts of neighbourly goodwill, in a constant service and self-sacrifice. It was by his love, and, above all, by the death, which most approved his love, that He at once reconciled all men to God and to each other. And "this ministry of the Reconciliation" He committed to his disciples when He Himself went up on high. From the heaven to which He rose He anointed them for this ministry, as He Himself had been anointed for it, with the Holy Ghost. And so at length it came to pass, that in his Church there was a centre of calm amid the confusions and strifes of the great world around it; a sacred island and sanctuary of peace in which all weary souls, sick of incessant conflict, might be at rest. In his Church, in his Church alone, there was a truce to the warring passions of men, a neutral ground on which all might meet and look each other in the face, and learn that they were of one blood by becoming of one spirit.

During the ten years in which the disciples had so little of their Master's spirit that they were unfaithful to "the ministry of the Reconciliation," so long as, neglecting the claims of Gentile races and his express commands, they carried "the good tidings of great joy" only to Jews and Jewish proselytes, they were not named with the Name of Christ, and were not worthy to bear it. *That* was an honour reserved for those whose love was as wide as his own, and who drew into his fellowship men of every kindred and tribe. But no sooner is this catholic spirit, this *caritas generis humani*, exhibited, than the Christian Name is

given—given by men indeed, yet surely by the will of God and his Christ. “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,” where certain poor Cypriots and Cyrenians, faithful to their high calling, together with Paul, a Roman Jew, and Barnabas, a Greek Jew, ministered the words of life indifferently to Jew and Gentile, to the Hebrew and to the “sinner,” to the Greek and to the “barbarian,” to the Romans and to their “enemies.”

And all we learn of the subsequent history of the Church of Antioch from the Inspired Record proves that it was actuated by a spirit of the broadest charity, and confirms the conjecture that it was because, moved by the love of Christ, they overleaped all barriers of race and condition, that its members, they first of all, were honoured to bear the name of Christ. Their neighbours had hardly called them “Christians” before we are told\* of an act of charity such as, in all likelihood, the world had never seen before. Prophets rose up in the Church and signified by the Spirit that a great dearth was about to befall the empire. What did these Gentile Christians do? Lay up a store for themselves against the evil time? They may have done *that*, but *that* is not what we are told of them. What we are told is, that every one of them “determined, according to his ability, *to send relief unto the brethren who dwelt in Judea.*” Was not this a deed worthy of the men who first bore the Christian Name, that, when they heard of the approach of famine, their first thought should be of their neighbours, not of themselves? that these Syrians, and Greeks, and Romans, of Antioch, who had once despised the Jews, should now, now that they had learned of Christ, hold them as “brethren beloved,” and minister to their necessities, loving them not in word only, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth?

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\* Acts xi. 27—30.

Throughout the Sacred Record, wherever they appear, they are animated by the same broad spirit of humanity. The Church at Antioch was the very heart and centre of the Apostolical missions. It was they who set Paul and Barnabas apart—sanctified, consecrated them—to the work of carrying the Gospel throughout the Gentile world.\* It was they who made a stand against the Judaizing tendencies of the brethren at Jerusalem, and won liberty of worship and action for the Gentile Churches.† It was from Antioch that St. Paul started on each of his great missionary journeys; it was to Antioch that he joyfully returned, to rehearse what God had done by him, and how “doors of faith” were being opened in the Gentile world, assured that *they* at least would share his joy. In short, there is every kind of proof that the disciples who were first called Christians eminently possessed the spirit of Christ, and deserved to bear his name, for their love to all men and their fervent desire to bring men of every race into the unity of the Faith.‡

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\* Acts xiii. 1 *et seq.*

† Acts. xv. 1 *et seq.*

‡ John of Antioch, better known as St. Chrysostom, in his homiletic addresses to the Antiochenes, touches on all these honourable points in their history. When, for example, the justly incensed Theodosius had degraded Antioch from the rank it held as the metropolis of Syria, transferring that dignity to Laodicea, the whole city poured into the church, the heathen no less than the Christian disciples looking to Chrysostom for comfort and hope. At such a time there must have been a strange power in such words as these: “Do ye grieve because the dignity of our city hath been taken away? Learn, then, what it is that constitutes the dignity of a city, and know that, if the city be not betrayed by its own inhabitants, no one can deprive it of its dignity. It is not its metropolitan rank, nor the size and beauty of its buildings, nor the number of its columns, nor its spacious colonnades and public walks, nor its precedence of other cities; but it is the piety of its people. This is the glory, the beauty, the security of a city; and if destitute of piety, it is of all cities the most degraded, though honours innumerable be conferred upon it by the Emperors. Would ye know

So that the historical origin of our Name is a solemn protest against all narrowness and sectarianism. If it teaches us anything, it teaches us that, being named with the Name of Christ, we ought in very deed to account nothing human alien to us. To us, no man should be common or unclean. We should wish and seek the good of every man, for the simple reason that he is a man. Our charity should be wide as the world, wide as humanity. Our very Name testifies that the Faith of Christ is not for an age, but for all time ; not for a land, but for the whole world ; not for a race or a sect, but for universal man.

In the fine Latin sentence which stands as a motto to this brief essay, and for which the English language yields but a sorry equivalent, St. Augustine describes himself thus : "*Christian* is my name, *Catholic* my surname." But the

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the true dignity of *your* city, and be made acquainted with its ancestral honours ? I will tell you what they are, not only that you may know, but that you may also emulate them. *It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians. That is an honour no other city in the world enjoys, not even the city of Romulus. Hence Antioch may stand forth before the whole earth, because of this fearless confession of its faith. Would ye learn another distinction of our city ? When a great dearth was prophesied, the Christians dwelling at Antioch determined, every man according to his ability, to send relief unto the brethren at Jerusalem. Behold, then, a second distinction—charity toward the distressed. The season restrained them not ; the prospect of calamity did not render them remiss ; but at a time when men gather together the stores of others they freely gave their own, and not to those near, but to those dwelling afar off. These are manifestations of faith in God, and love toward our neighbour. Would ye know an additional distinction of our city ? Certain men came down to Antioch from Judea, subverting the faith, and introducing Jewish observances. The disciples at Antioch did not silently submit to this innovation ; but, gathering the Church together, they sent Paul and Barnabas up to Jerusalem, and caused the Apostles to proclaim throughout the world doctrines free from Jewish error. These are the distinctions which constitute the dignity and glory of our city. They render it a metropolis, not of earth, but of heaven.—"Hom. ad. Pop. Antioch."*

xvii., 2.

two names are really one ; to be Christian is to be Catholic. It is to be animated by charity for the whole human race, a charity restrained by no difference of creed, no distinction of blood, no defect of culture, no depravity of character. It is to love all men because they are men, and because Christ loved them ; and to seek their good because He sought it, and as He sought it, seeking *first* those who are “ lost ” and are most in need of our help.

If, now, we attempt to sum up in a single sentence all that we have learned of the Christian Name, we must say :—*Christians are Christ's men, men who make his service the daily business of their lives ; his disciples, they believe what He has taught and follow the rule of life laid down by Him ; his partizans, they heartily espouse his cause, and hold it dearer than all besides ; anointed with his Spirit, they are consecrated to his ministry of reconciliation ; inspired and actuated by his love, their charity is wide as the world, and manifests itself not in word only, nor in tongue, but in a constant and growing endeavour to help and serve all sorts and conditions of men.* The very ideal of Christian character is implied in the Christian Name.

## XXI.

## Grace before Meat.

1 CORINTHIANS x. 30.

HAPPILY there has been of late years a very general revolt against that which is merely outward and formal in religion. In many ways it has been shewn that good men are more than ever giving the preference to the spirit over the letter, the life over the form. They refuse, for instance, to be bound any longer to the *bitter* observance of the Sabbath; they have learned that the Lord's Day, with its rest and enjoyment and cheerful worship, is a whole world apart from the Hebrew Sabbath, with its gloomy restraints and oppressive ceremonialisms. They no longer frown on the innocent amusements which give relief and freshness to a life worn and saddened with over-much labour, or hope to save their souls by abusing their bodies. They are beginning to believe that every creature of God is good, if it be thankfully received and wisely used. They are beginning to believe that the wonderful complexities of nerve and humour in the eye were designed to fit it for the enjoyment of the beauty which God has lavished on his works; that the ear was fitted up with its marvellous apparatus of conducting and reverberating tubes and drums, in order that it might be charmed with the concord of sweet sounds; that certain cachinatory muscles would not have been inserted into cheek and throat if it were wrong to laugh, nor the

whole body instinctively bend and sway to the influence of music if it were a sin to dance.

These are some of the signs of that recent happy revolt against formality and conventionalism in which we do and will rejoice. None the less, we must remember that, through our folly and weakness, every good movement is in danger of being pushed to an extreme ; and that, if the movement be of the nature of a revolt, this danger is very greatly enhanced. Those who conduct a political revolution are hardly ever content with securing the ends which, at their start, they had in view ; they are carried far beyond these, and too often land in a democratic tyranny or a democratic licence even more hateful than the despotism against which they rebelled. And in like manner those who have rebelled against the rigid yoke of formalism are in great danger of running into the opposite extreme of licence ; in great danger either of neglecting forms altogether or of imposing their freedom as a yoke on consciences which are as yet too weak to bear it.

Now we have none of us, formalist or freeman, a right to make ourselves the standard to which all our brethren are to conform ; nor is it wise of us to forget that religious forms and habits are necessary to us, at least, so long as we are in the body. The life is more than any one of its organs ; but how shall it reveal and culture itself except through the organs which bring it into relation with the world ? The spirit is more than the letter, and it is well that we should give it the preference ; but how shall the spirit express itself, save through the letter ? It is well to hallow all our days to the Lord ; but will it help us to do that if we neglect the rest and worship of the Lord's day ? It is well that we should always be dead to sin and alive to holiness ; but it will not help us to reach that good end to undervalue the ordinance that symbolizes it. It is well that every table at

which we sit should be holy, and every meal become a sacrament; but to partake of the Lord's Supper is the way to hallow all we do. And in like manner it is well that "in everything we should give thanks." But we shall not be aided to this perpetual gratitude by omitting to give thanks at set and customary times.

Yet there are many, especially among the advocates of freedom in religion, who have given up the good old custom of saying "grace before meat," and many more who retain it somewhat doubtfully, and half suspect that it would be wise to give it up. It has often happened to us to hear some such arguments as these. "We make too much of eating and drinking. I, for one, am more grateful for a wise book, or when I hear sweet music, or when I fall into pleasant companionship, than when I sit down to dinner. Why should I thank God for my dinner, and not for my company, or my music, or my book? And then, how often the 'grace' sounds like a mere farce. Here are a dozen people round a table, full of cheerful mirth and noisy talk. For a minute there is a sudden lull, while the host, or some clerical guest, asks a blessing, or returns thanks; and then the talk and laughter break out again, and they all feel the 'grace' as an interruption, or a hypocritical pretence. What can be more incongruous and disrespectful than thus to thrust a religious act into the midst of social gaiety?"

These arguments sound plausibly enough, but, after all, there is very little in them. The thought of God ought never to be strange or unwelcome to good men; nor would it seem so strange to many of them as it sometimes does, but for the lingering effects of a most injurious prejudice. The fact is, that a good many of us can't quite believe that God is not angry with us every time we laugh; and, therefore, we cannot take our mirth into his presence so freely and habitually as we take our sorrows. We indeed should

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hardly hold it a compliment if our children shut us out of all their play, and only came to us when they wanted us to comfort them, or to help them ; yet we treat the good tender Father in Heaven as we should not like our children to treat us ! To many, indeed, the thought of God—and what more horrible insult can they offer to the Gracious Majesty of heaven ?—which comes with the grace before or after meat, is like the death's head at the feasts of the Egyptians ; it comes only to remind them of their mortality ; but should it be thus with those who call God “ Father ” ? Once let us get right thoughts of Him, as pleased in all our pleasures as well as afflicted in all our afflictions, and we shall forthwith cease to find anything incongruous or hypocritical in an acknowledgment of Him amid our most mirthful enjoyments.

Nor does the other argument carry more weight, the argument which takes form in the question, “ Why should I thank God for my dinner, rather than for the book, or the music, or the company which I like even better than my dinner ? ” Why indeed ? Why not thank Him for all ? But it will not help you to thank Him for all to neglect thanking Him for any one. And there are special reasons why you should thank Him for food. For it is surely right that in a Christian household there should be *some* set times for united acknowledgment of God's goodness ; and meal-time is in most houses the only time in which all the members of the family are gathered together. What other time is there so suitable and convenient as this for a common expression of gratitude to the Giver of every good and perfect gift ? Your book you may read alone—and the oftener you inwardly thank God for putting a good book into your hand the better ; music you may hear alone, or in company with strangers, or when the little ones are a-bed ; your pleasant society—for which as well as for sweet music it is right that you should give thanks—involves the presence of

friends: but at your meals the whole household meets, and for the most part only the household, thus affording the one opportunity for the whole family to unite in praising God.

This, however, is taking the low ground of convenience. We may take the higher ground of Divine example and sanction. There is, indeed, *no law* enjoining grace before or after meat in the Gospel of Christ, any more than there is any law for keeping holy the first day of the week; but for the one as for the other there is example and inspired sanction. When Jesus gave that great dinner party, or supper party, on the mountain, at which He fed five thousand men besides women and children, He "*blessed the bread*" before He brake it, probably using the ordinary Hebrew grace, since no special words are reported, and thus veiling under an ordinary form of speech the Divine power by which He multiplied the food.

But Jesus was about to work a miracle, and it may be thought that his example goes no further than this—that when *we* can multiply the food upon the board by blessing it, it will be well for us to use the blessing. We cannot however, take the same objection to the example of St. Paul. After that dreadful night on board the ship of Alexandria, when all hope of being saved was lost, Paul recommended the exhausted seamen and passengers to take some meat for their health's sake. "*And when he had thus spoken, he took bread and gave thanks to God in presence of them all,*"—the two hundred and seventy-six companions of his voyage, most of whom were heathen and idolators.

"Ah," but it may be said, "Paul took this opportunity of testifying to the only Wise and True God in the presence of idolators, in order to teach them that there was *one* God whom all the uproar of the storm could not deafen, and who was able to help after all hope was lost. We trust that in similar conditions we could hear a similar testimony; but

that is no reason why we should say grace every day in our own families."

If that is the thought of any of my readers, they are surely somewhat hard to please, yet I think Paul himself will fit them with a sufficient example and reason yet. In 1st Corinthians, Chapter x., he is laying down the Christian rule about foods. He maintains that all meats, whether they have been slain in the shambles connected with the heathen temples, or in the shambles of the open market, are lawful food, if they be received with thanksgiving. But the man of strong and well-informed conscience, who can eat these idol-meats, is not to make himself a law to the weak brother, and compel him to eat of them too. Nor is the weak brother to make himself a law to the strong, and condemn him for eating them. For, argues Paul, "If I, *with thanksgiving*, be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for *that for which I give thanks*." The word translated, "I give thanks, is *ευχαριστῶ*, from which we get our name for the Lord's Supper, the *Eucharist*; and Paul's argument is, that food is sanctified by thanksgiving, that, even though it has been offered to idols, yet the grateful praise of a pious heart cleanses and hallows it, transforms it from an evil sacrifice into a sacramental food. And the points to be noted here are, that food and thanksgiving are so indissolubly connected in Paul's mind that he uses "*that for which I give thanks*" as a synonym for food, as if it were simply impossible for him to eat without some devout ascription of gratitude; and, moreover, that he believes the thanksgiving of a devout heart to have the power of raising the daily bread into an Eucharistical food which shall nourish the soul no less than the body; the bread strengthening the physical nature, the gratitude it excites, and the blessing that gratitude calls down, strengthening the spiritual nature.

These thoughts are expanded in 1 Tim. iv. 3—5. Here

St. Paul speaks of meat as that "which God has created to be received *with thanksgiving* of them who believe, and know the truth. For everything God has made," he continues, "is good, and nothing to be refused; for it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer." God, you observe, has created meats for all men, but He has created them to be received "with thanksgiving by them who believe;" for them to receive meats without thanksgiving is for *them* to act as unbelievers, and to violate the purpose of God; and they are thus to receive their food because thanksgiving and prayer "sanctify" to our use whatever good creatures of God may be set before us.

It cannot be denied, therefore, if we accept the teaching of St. Paul, that to receive our daily food without thanksgiving is to sink to the level of the heathen and the unbeliever; nor can it be denied that Paul assigns a sacramental efficacy to the thanksgiving, a power which sanctifies the daily meal into an Eucharistical feast. In the first passage I quoted he implies, that the devout thanksgiving of a pious heart transforms all idolatrous meat into a sacramental food; and in the second passage he expressly affirms that meat is "*sanctified* by the word of God and by prayer," and that, because it is thus sanctified, we ought to receive it with thanksgiving.

Now what is this peculiar sacramental power which Paul ascribes to prayer and thanksgiving? To this question, suggested by the servant, let the Master reply. The Lord Jesus, in a certain place, affirms, "Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."\* Ah! but what does that mean? It means, that every creature—corn, and the beasts given for food, among them—was spoken into being by God, that they are his

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\* Matthew iv. 4.

variously embodied words, that they derive all their vital and quickening qualities from the Creative Word which formed them and is imminent in them. "God," says Luther, "does not speak grammatical vocables, but real essential things. Thus, sun and moon, heaven and earth, Peter and Paul, thou and I, are nothing but words of God." Man, therefore, does not live simply by food, but by the will and word of God. *Even in bread man does not live by bread alone.* "The life is more than meat," and more than meat can sustain. Your physical structure and organs may be perfect and in perfect health; science may bend all its wisdom to provide you with suitable and nourishing food; and yet, if God do not bless the food, you will die. There is a mystery in life, a secret spring of vital energy which physiologists have not discovered, which physicians cannot replenish. And this mystery is half hidden, half revealed in the words, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by the word of God." *There must be the perpetual secret effluence of the Eternal Creative Word into the invisible springs of life*, if we are not to perish—an effluence which, though commonly given through and with food, may be given apart from food; as we see in the forty days' fasts of Moses, Elijah, and Jesus Christ, each of whom, we are taught, lived on that which proceeded out of the mouth of God.

When, therefore, we ask a blessing, we recognize our dependence on God; we acknowledge not only that our daily bread is from Him, but also that we do not live by bread alone, that only as He blesses the bread can it minister to our nourishment and strength. The meat is "sanctified," raised to the power of a sacrament, "by the Word of God," and the Word or blessing of God is the heavenly response to our "prayer and thanksgiving."

Here, then, are sufficient reasons, whatever the progress of modern thought and freedom may object, for the godly

and ancient custom of "grace before meat"—a custom of which the breach is almost as frequent as the observance. It is well that in a Christian household there should be united acts of worship, and as commonly the whole household meet only when they sit down to their meals, this is the most convenient time for such worshipful acts. It is a custom the breach of which, as St. Paul tells us, lands us with unbelievers and those who know not the truth. It is a custom for which the Master Himself assigns a philosophical reason which the learned would be the first to admit, viz., that something more than food—even the effluence of the Fount of all Life into the secret wells of our life—is indispensable to our continuance whether in being or in health.

Let me only add that the result of this brief examination into the grounds of a custom so much neglected as that of "saying grace" should lead us to ask whether we are not in some danger of undervaluing other and still more beneficial forms. The tendency of the time is, happily, against formalism. All the more, therefore, we need to guard against the extreme of neglecting or slighting forms of every kind. This assuredly is our danger, for freedom soon degenerates, unless it be wisely guarded, into insubordination and license. Down with conventionalism in religion by all means, and down with hypocrisy to the lowest hell; but retain all useful habits, even though they may have been abused, and the forms and sacraments of worship which conserve and express true piety, even though hypocrisy has discredited them. The Germans have a quaint proverb, which in these times is often in one's thoughts; "*By all means empty the bath down the gutter, but try and save the baby.*" For there is such a general and energetic emptying out of the slops of formalism and cant and hypocritical pretence just now, that one cannot but fear a little

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lest baby Piety should come to harm, or quietly float down the stream till it be lost to sight.

Let us, therefore, ask ourselves, and that very seriously, Do we nourish by habitual study and devotion that inner spiritual life which is ever ready to break out into thanksgiving, which does not shrink from loyally obeying Christ in all his ordinances and commandments, which renews its strength by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the new Paschal Sacrifice, and which delights to observe all helpful forms and customs of the true spiritual worship?

## XXII.

## The Revelation of God in Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 19.

WE are so made that we must theorize, must theologize even. As men with discourse of reason, we cannot be content with isolated and unconnected facts, however numerous or momentous they may be ; we must attempt to group and classify them, to bring them under some ruling principle, some general law. Above all, we must arrange our facts in sequences ; we must be able to say, " This springs from that," or, " If this be so, then that will follow." In short, we instinctively argue upward from effects to their cause, or downward from a cause to its effects. It is in this " discourse of reason " that science has had its origin. Take astronomy as an example. In the heaven above us there are certain facts, or phenomena, which men could not fail to observe ; as, for instance, the rising and setting of the sun, the waxing and waning of the moon, the regular recurrence of the stars, at certain periods, along a fixed path or orbit. Merely to observe and record these facts was not enough for reasonable man. He was compelled by his very nature to reason, *i.e.*, to theorize upon them, to seek for some law under which they might be ranged, for some cause to which they might be traced. He could not but ask, " From what does the regular order and recurrence of these phenomena spring ? " And, after

other answers to the question had been given and accepted for a time, he lit on that which satisfies him to this day, in the law of gravitation. This law is simply an inference, an hypothesis, a theory ; but it accounts for the astronomical facts as no other theory does : and in this, therefore, at least for the present, and till some wider generalization be reached, the inquisitive reason of man rests and is satisfied. Thus, from a multitude of effects, scattered through the universe, man has argued up to a cause, or law, to which they may all be referred.

But now, having reached a cause, he forthwith begins to argue downward from that cause to its necessary effects. He observes, for instance, certain "perturbations," certain deviations from their orbit, on the part of those planets which are at the furthest remove from the sun. For these "perturbations" he must account. Accordingly he reasons thus :— " Gravitation is the law. It must be the attraction of gravitation which draws these planets from their path. To draw bodies of such a magnitude so far from their orbits there must be another planet in the solar system not seen as yet ; and this planet must be of such and such a weight, and move in such and such an orbit, if it is to produce the observed effects." And, having thus, with at least as much *faith* as wisdom, predetermined the existence, place, and magnitude of an undiscovered world, he bends the telescope on the predicted point, and the planet Neptune swims into sight.

Thus science is simply our reading, our theory, of natural facts ; and we reach this theory by arguing up from effects to their cause, or by arguing down from a cause to its effects.

We pursue precisely the same method, the method of science, in dealing with the facts of human character and life. When, for example, a great man has closed his career,

and we recall the facts of his life, we instantly begin to theorize upon them. We cannot leave them a mere disorderly and contradictory jumble of separate actions. We want to reduce them to order, to bring them under law, to find a centre round which we may group them. And so, especially if we have to write his memoir or his epitaph, we try to discover what his ruling principle or affection was,—whether he was actuated by ambition, for instance, or patriotism, or pride, by the love of wealth or the love of learning, the love of self or the love of man. Accurately, or inaccurately, we frame our conception of his character, his dominant impulse, his animating principle; and under this we arrange the multitude of his actions, desires, aims. Thus we get a law for our facts, a cause for the effects we have observed.

The dramatist pursues precisely the opposite course. Instead of arguing upward from facts to their causes or law, he assumes a cause, and argues downward to its effects. He knows that a certain ruling principle,—as ambition or vanity, benevolence or justice,—will work out in certain ways, produce certain results. And, having conceived his imaginary character, he invents situations in which that character is tested, developed, disclosed. Through scene after scene we see the ruling vice displayed or corrected, the ruling virtue unfolded or blighted.

Reasonable man *must* reason, *i.e.*, he must theorize; he must trace effects to their cause, and argue from the cause to the effects it will infallibly produce. Why, then, may he not theologize? or why, as we are so loudly told at the present day, should there be a necessary and fatal hostility between the scientific and the theological methods of thought, an hostility which forbids a man of science to be a sincere and devout believer? Theology is, or should be, as scientific in its method as science itself; it is, or should be,

a careful induction from observed and recorded facts ; it is, or should be, a sincere endeavour to trace effects to their cause, or from a cause to deduce its necessary effects. In the physical universe, in the history of man, and in our own hearts, we find a multitude of facts which proclaim the existence of God, which indicate his character and our relations to Him. Are these the only facts on which we must not reason, of which we are to shape no large and consistent theory ? Must we pause here, and decline to pursue the path we follow in every other province of thought ? Nay, our only hope of reconciling Science and Theology is to make our theology truly scientific, to base it on honest inductions, to shew that, if the truths of Revelation could not have been discovered by human reason, they nevertheless accord with the reason which they transcend.

Is that impossible ? It is by no means impossible. We need to remember, indeed, that Science is only a *provisional* reading of the facts of Nature ; that the scientific interpretation of the universe differs in every age, changing with the changing time, taking new and larger forms as the years pass ; that even since the beginning of the present century it has had at least three shibboleths—Convulsion, Continuity, and Evolution—and has stoutly declared it necessary to our scientific salvation that we should pronounce each of them in turn. And, in like manner, we need to remember that Theology is but a provisional reading of the facts of religion ; that it is but a human, imperfect, and ever-varying interpretation of the contents of Scripture, and changes its forms and terms at least as rapidly as science itself. The commonest phrases of *our* divinity schools—such as “documentary hypothesis,” “Elohistic and Jehovistic scriptures”—were unknown to our fathers. The great facts of Religion and Revelation remain the same, indeed, through all ages

and changes, as do the great facts of Nature. But our interpretations of these facts vary, our theories about them change; they grow larger and more complete as men grow wiser. *God* does not change, nor do His relations to men: but *our conceptions* of Him and of our relations to Him are very different from those of the early fathers of the Church; just as our conceptions of the universe are a great advance upon those which were held before Galileo arose and Kepler and Newton.

And, hence, when men talk glibly of reconciling Scripture with Science, if they mean anything more than a sincere attempt to bring the scientific theory of *the moment* into accord with *the current* interpretation of Scripture, they are guilty of a manifest absurdity; for we know neither the Scriptures nor Science: there is more and even much more, in both, than we have yet discovered. If, indeed, we had either the truth of Science or the truth of Scripture in its absolute forms at our command, the task would not be so hopeless as it is; for, in that case, we should have at least one constant and unvarying standard. But the theology of to-day is not the theology of yesterday, nor is the science of to-day the science of yesterday. The Church's interpretation of the Bible, like the scientific interpretation of the universe, is ever changing, and, let us hope, ever advancing: as how should it not, if God is really conducting the education of the human race, if now "we know but in part," and yet are "to know even as also we are known?"

Now this fact, that both our Science and our Theology are but human and provisional interpretations of eternal facts, should be well borne in mind both by the theologian and by the man of science, since it conduces to modesty, patience, forbearance. It forbids dogmatism, and that tendency to judge and condemn those who differ from us, which is as pronounced in scientific as in religious men, and which does

equal discredit to both. It encourages the hope that as "knowledge grows from more to more," the theories of science and the interpretations of theology "may make one music as before, but vaster." But it does not forbid, it encourages, any thoughtful and sincere attempt to adjust the present results of scientific investigation to the conclusions which have been drawn from a devout study of the Bible, imperfect as no doubt both are: for it is only as the provisional generalizations of Science and Theology are fairly stated and compared that we can learn where as yet our knowledge is defective, which of our conclusions are dubious and need revision, and so be urged on to a more patient and generous quest of truth. Above all, since we live in an age dominated by the scientific method of thought, we should endeavour to adopt this method in our theological discussions and inquiries. It is not by setting ourselves against the spirit of the age, but by yielding to it so far as we honestly may, that we are likely both to win the age to God and to win for ourselves a wider knowledge of the truth. We are followers of Him who spake the truth "as men were able to bear it." He who spake nothing without a proverb or parable to men who daily heard proverb and parable in their synagogues and schools, were He with us now, would surely speak to us in the scientific spirit and method which are shaping the age in which we live.

In the spirit of humility, then, fully conscious that we know but in part, we should endeavour to frame for ourselves, in the method of science, a theology, which shall also be a gospel—veritable good news of redemption and life to us and to all men. We *must* frame such a theology, if we are to retain our place and function in the world, if we are to save the world from the unrest and misery of a life without God. It is to be feared that the Church is largely answerable for the scepticism of the world. It is very much

because we have presented the truth in a hard dogmatic way, because we have not even endeavoured to shew how reasonable it is, that we have failed to convince and persuade "them that are without." And now, at last, we have reached a point at which many who are within the pale are giving up theology, even if they do not also give up religion—a point at which many who do believe are likely to lose their faith, unless we rise to the occasion, and commend the truth to their reason as well as to their heart.

And why should we not set ourselves to this task, why not seek to present the truth on its reasonable and persuasive side, rather than to announce it with authority, and to denounce as sinners all who do not accept our conceptions of it? There are facts enough at our command both in the universe and in the Bible; and we shall not alter the facts by changing the point from which we view them; we shall not be unfaithful to the truth by endeavouring so to conceive it as to make it tell on our generation. All we shall do will be to re-arrange and re-classify the facts, to bring them under general laws, to reason from them upward and downward, to weave them into a large and consistent theory.

It will be my aim, then, in this Essay, to apply the scientific method to a few of the most familiar and fundamental truths of religion; and thus to indicate the line which, as I believe, it will be our wisdom to take in presenting the whole circle of Christian doctrine to the men of our day and generation.

#### I. GOD.

But where shall we begin? Instinctively, we begin with *God*. And as the origin of all religion is the search for God, as, moreover, our whole theology takes its complexion from our conception of the character of God, the prompting of spiritual instinct is confirmed by reason. We begin with

God, then, and we ask, we endeavour to infer, not *that* He is—we do not now touch that question—but *what* He is, to deduce his character from the facts before us, to learn how He stands related to us and to the universe in which we dwell. And here our task is comparatively easy and simple. Without effort, we *may* frame a conception of God by the inferential method, such a conception as Science itself may welcome and approve. We are on familiar ground, and may go lightly over it.

(1.) First of all we turn to the physical world for our facts; and here, in Nature, we find everywhere the reign of law. All things—plants, animals, men; sun, moon, and stars; even storms, comets, meteors, with whatever seems most erratic—fulfil the law of their being. This law they did not impose on themselves, for they cannot repeal it, though they often rebel against it; it is imposed on them by a superior power, a power which rewards obedience and avenges disobedience. Man, for instance, is obviously under a law of health, against which he often sins, but which he cannot annul, however painful may be the results of his disobedience to that law. And so, throughout the natural world, we find a law independent of the will of the creatures, superior to them, supreme over them, capable, as we say, of asserting and avenging itself. Whence does this law come? and who administers it? For, of course, no law can really administer or assert itself. There must be some one behind and above the law. “Law” is only our name for a sequence, for a method of action, for a right or an invariable method. It implies the existence of a Power, or Person, whose method it is, whose will it expresses. The laws of Nature can no more administer themselves than the laws of the land. Just as the laws of the land imply the existence of an authority, a magistrate, who will act on them and assert them, so the laws of Nature bear witness to an unseen

Force, or Power, or Person, who imposes and enforces them, rewarding those who obey, punishing those who violate them. This power we call God. We ascribe to a personal and Divine Source what Matthew Arnold is content to name that "stream of tendency by which all things fulfil the law of their being;" for we know of no stream which does not flow from some source, and we know of no adequate source of universal law save the Maker of heaven and earth. So that our first and simplest conception of God, the conception we derive from the facts of the physical universe, is that He is the Source of physical law.

He, moreover, who imposes and administers the laws of Nature must be both omnipotent and all-wise, *i.e.*, there are no bounds that we can conceive whether to his wisdom or power. Water, fire, air, plants, animals, the physical nature of man, in short all the great natural forces, through all their products, however many and various, compose *one* world. Nay, more; Science emphatically declares that all worlds, all the innumerable host of heaven, compose *one* universe. All are dependent the one on the other, all interact on each other, and come under one and the same series of physical sequences. *We* cannot, therefore, as the pre-scientific ages did, parcel out the universe among a multitude of separate deities. Science knows of no pantheon. There must be one dominant and supreme Power which rules over all. And this Power, which sits behind the laws of Nature, must be inconceivably great and wise. If it were not wise and strong beyond our reach of thought, the universe, instead of being a harmony of invariable and beneficent sequences, would break into ruinous and irremediable confusion; disaster would tread on the heels of disaster, and the end would be destruction and death. What, then, shall we call this Power? how name it? *We* call it God. Others, hiding their ignorance in unmeaning and self-contradictory phrases,

may call it "the stream of tendency," ignoring the fountain from which the stream flows. We say that law implies a Lawgiver, that power implies a Person from whom it proceeds; and we worship God as the *sole* Source of the forces and laws of Nature.\*

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\* It is no part of our present task, or aim, to demonstrate the existence of a personal God. But as many, who grasp the conception of a Force or Power as shaping and controlling the natural universe, seem to have an insuperable difficulty in rising to the conception of a Divine Person, the Creator and moral Governor of the universe, we commend to their consideration Professor Frohshammer's masterly solution of the problem. In his review of Strauss's book on "The Old and the New Faiths," he writes.—"The assertion that the notion of personality implies limitation, and is applicable only to what is finite and relative, but not to the absolute, is taken from Fichte, and is by no means correct. This will be clearly shewn by a deeper consideration of the essential elements of personality. These are—existence, consciousness of this existence, and control over it. Distinction from, and therefore limitation by others, is not an essential element of personality, but an accidental sign of relative personality. An absolute personality cannot therefore be said to be impossible; for it may find *in itself*, in the *constituent elements of its existence*, without the necessity of any other being, the distinctions necessary for personal consciousness." (The careful reader will see how fine a glimpse this sentence gives us into the doctrine of the Trinity.) "And as distinction from others, and limitation by them, is not one of the essential elements of personality, neither is personality essentially subject to limitation in regard to action. Personality, self-consciousness, and freedom of the will, is rather the power of breaking through the narrow limits of relative monadic existence, of expanding into the infinite by consciousness and will, of rising above itself, and, on the other hand, of receiving the infinite into its own consciousness. The more a man cultivates his idiosyncratic nature, the more independent he becomes in knowledge and the exercise of the will, the more he suffices for himself, and the less need he has of others. According to Strauss's theory, the more perfect the personality the greater the limitation.

"Moreover, the Divine absolute personality cannot be altogether compared with human personality. *The Divine Being cannot be without the perfection which manifests itself in the human personality, as the highest of which we have any knowledge.* If we define God by other pre-

(2.) Again, when we pass from the physical universe to consider the nature and history of Man, we meet with facts which conduct us to a new and loftier conception of God. For in man and his story we find a moral as well as a physical law. From the very first there has been in all races, however they have differed in character, capacity, culture, a sense of right and wrong. This sense may vary, and does vary, but it grows clearer and fuller as the stream of time rolls on. Despite all its variations, moreover, the dictates of this moral sense are more uniform in essentials than we sometimes think. All races, for example, in all ages, have felt that it was wrong to rob or kill a neighbour, that they were bound to help and defend him. The difficulty has been to determine the question, "Who is my neighbour?" At first, men held that only the members of their own family were neighbours in a sense that made them sacred from wrong; then, only the men of their own sept, or clan; then, only the members of their own nation, empire, confederacy; it is only of late that we have begun to learn that every man is our neighbour, even though he should also be our enemy. Still, the recognized neighbour has always been sacred, if not in fact, yet according to the law written on the heart. Science admits the existence and the growth of this moral sense; it admits, it proclaims that, throughout the complex and troubled story of our race, a moral law has revealed itself, a sense of right and wrong which has grown at once more pure and more authoritative as the centuries have elapsed.

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dicates of earthly perfection, we must not deny Him the highest phase of it, must not regard Him *as less than personal*. That would be imperfection. The personality of the absolute must be of a higher and more intensified kind than human personality. It may be said, therefore, that God is super-personal. His personality includes the essential elements of man's personality. But it is also absolute in a way that transcends man's comprehension."—*Contemporary Review*.

Whence did this moral sense come, this inward law ; and whence did it derive the imperious authority with which it speaks? Obviously, men have not imposed it on themselves. They have been in constant and notorious rebellion against it ; and, much as they have suffered from it, they have never been able to throw it off. It does not change as they change, nor does it die when they die. Clearly, then, it comes from "an austere and an enduring authority" which sits high above men, and all the ages and changes of time. This authority we name God ; we claim for *Him* that moral sense which expresses itself in the laws of human morality, that conscience which is for ever excusing men, or else accusing them, in all they do. It is simply absurd to call the inward voice "the voice of nature ;" for, as we have just seen, "Nature is but the name of an effect whose cause is God." It is equally absurd to call the dictates of the moral sense "the moral law," as though that accounted for its power ; for, as we have also seen, no law can impose and administer itself. There must be *being* behind law, or there could be no law. So that our second conception of God is, that He is the Light of every man that cometh into the world, that He is "the Power that makes for righteousness" throughout the troubled story of humanity.

(3.) Can we get no further than this in our endeavour to think of God according to the method of science? Surely we may. If we act on the Platonic saying, "*To find God, look within,*" if we study our own hearts, we may rise to another and still loftier conception of Him. We have seen that He made us, not we ourselves : and that He rules us, not we ourselves. We may be sure, therefore, that we derive from Him whatever is good in ourselves, and still more, whatever is best. The stream cannot rise above its source, nor the creature above the Creator. "He who

reflects upon himself," says Plotinus, "reflects upon his own original, and finds the clearest impression of some eternal nature and perfect being stamped upon his own soul." "God," says a modern Platonist and divine,\* "has so copied forth Himself into the whole life and energy of man's soul as that the lovely characters of divinity may be most easily seen and read of all men within themselves; as they say Phidias, the famous statuary, after he had made the statue of Minerva, with the greatest exquisiteness of art, to be set up in the Acropolis at Athens, afterwards impressed his own image so deeply in her buckler that no one could delete or efface it without destroying the whole statue. And if we would know what the *impress* of souls is, it is nothing but God Himself, who could not write his own name, so as that it might be read, but only in rational natures." And in these hearts of ours, weak and wayward as they are, we find a wonderful and blessed capacity of love, which is the spring of all that we hold to be best and noblest in human character and history,—of pity, compassion, friendship, heroic labour and self-sacrifice. Selfishness is the root of all sin; love is the "conquering opposite" of selfishness. This love, then, is the prime gift of God to man. He who gives love, and gives it so largely, and gives it to so many, must not He Himself have love and be love? Love is the very life and crown of manhood; and therefore we may be sure that "God is love."

May we? How, then, do we account for the innumerable miseries that are in the world? How can God, if God be love, endure to impose so many cruel pains and losses upon us? But are they really cruel? Moses often seemed hard to the children of Israel. They thought it hard that he should lead them out into the desert, that he should harass them with enactments the value of which they

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\* John Smith, of Cambridge.

could not perceive. But was he therefore hard? The desert was the way to the goodly land. Only as they obeyed the enactments he imposed could they rise above themselves, and become free and holy and good. The fact is that every wise man *must* seem hard to those who are less wise. If they are much less wise and good than he, he will seem to be for ever pursuing an impossible ideal, for ever seeking to raise them, by austere and painful methods, to a virtue and wisdom they cannot value as yet. Every ruler, in proportion as he is wise, and his empire is large, and he has many and great interests to consult, must seem, at times, to be indifferent to the interests of this province or that, must call on this man and that to sacrifice himself, or much that he loves, for the general good. And God is very wise; his empire is very large. To me, to you, He will often seem indifferent or austere, when He is but seeking the greater good of all. To us all, He will seem hard, even cruel at times, as He leads us through the desert to the better land, through the painful corrections of law to a free and stable virtue. The very perfection of his love, which impels Him to make us partakers of his divine nature, will often cloud his love from us; and we shall not always see that "every cloud that veileth love, itself is love." But if we have convinced ourselves that He is in very deed the Source of law in the physical universe; if we have further convinced ourselves that He is the Power that makes for righteousness throughout the history of humanity; if, above all, we have convinced ourselves that He is that Divine Fountain of Love from which our love springs, let us at least admit that there must be much in Him which as yet we cannot comprehend. Do we, much as we know of it, comprehend the natural world? Do we comprehend the whole human story, though of this, too, we know much? Can we so much as fathom our own hearts? How, then, should we

comprehend Him who administers the laws of Nature, who shapes the story of man, who is the Source of all that is deepest in us and best?

Here, then, by the scientific method of inference and induction, we reach a threefold conception of God, a conception which we may fairly hope that even those who are most deeply imbued with the spirit of the age will feel to be a reasonable conception. We find Him in Nature, in History, in Man; and we conclude Him to be the vital Source of physical law, the Power that makes for righteousness, and the Fountain of all love and goodness.

## II. CHRIST.

Were there need it would be easy to vindicate this conception against all comers and all the objections they could urge. But there can be little need to vindicate it, since those who believe in a God at all, and with these alone are we for the present concerned, can hardly think of Him as less than the Lord of the universe, the Providence of man, and the Origin of all that is good and divine. With cheerful and unforced accord they repeat the first article of the Christian Creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." It is only when we come to the second article of the Creed, "And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord," that many of them part company with us, or are tempted to part company with us. That God *is*, and that He is *good*, they cordially admit; but that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," they doubt, or, at the best, they doubt whether *this* conception can be reached in the scientific method. If it be revealed to Faith, they cannot see how it accords with Reason. At the very outset they ask, "Is it reasonable to conceive of God as manifold, instead of simple; as having at least a dual instead

of a single personality; as being Father and Son, instead of being one Lord over all?" A little further on they ask, "But is it reasonable to conceive of God as becoming man, in order to reveal Himself to men?" And still further they ask, "Is not the revelation of God attributed to the Man Christ Jesus opposed to that conception of Him which reason frames?" Now that God *was* in Christ I hold it to be not only true, but reasonable, *i.e.*, demonstrably true, although this truth involves such profound mysteries as the supernatural and miraculous Revelation of God to man, and the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.

Tradition relates that St. Augustine was one day wandering by the sea, plunged in thought, and meditating the plan of a work on the Trinity, when he saw a boy playing on the beach, and making a ditch in the sand. When the great theologian of the Western Church asked him what he was doing, the boy replied, "I want to empty the sea into my ditch." "And am not I trying to do the same as this child," said Augustine to himself, "in seeking to exhaust with my reason the infinity of God, and to collect it within the limits of my own mind?" Now I am not so childish as to think that I can *empty the sea into my ditch*. And, therefore, I do not undertake to explain and prove all the great mysteries involved in the Incarnation and the Redemption of Christ. But, in some fashion, we must all speak of these mysteries, and we ought to speak of them, so far as possible, in a reasonable way. And, therefore, I will endeavour to shew how they may be stated so as to commend themselves to the reason of reasonable men, and to obviate the objections to which I have referred.

(1.) And, first, I affirm that it is reasonable to conceive of the Divine Nature as including the Son no less than the Father: even the doctrine of the proper deity of Christ, nay even the doctrine of the Trinity, has a logical aspect and

basis. We have seen that God is the Source of all that is good, that we can nowhere find any kind of goodness which is not in Him. But is there not a goodness in trust as well as in being trustworthy? Is there not a goodness in receiving as well as in giving? Is there not a goodness in obeying freely as well as in ruling rightly? Is it not good to be patient, and humble, and meek, to suffer and sacrifice oneself for others? Is not this passive and dependent goodness even more pathetic and winning than an active and bountiful goodness? Must not, then, this more pathetic goodness be in God, the Source of all good? Must not *He* trust as well as deserve trust, obey as well as rule, suffer, and make sacrifices, as well as lavishly bestow the gifts of his Divine bounty? Is it not therefore reasonable to conceive that, in the Divine Nature and Being, there is and ever has been a Son as well as a Father, an Eternal Son as well as the Father Everlasting; a Son to trust as well as a Father to invite trust; a Son to obey as well as a Father to command; a Son to receive as well as a Father to give; a Son to make sacrifice as well as a Father to accept and bless the sacrifice? Such a conception is reasonable; it is most reasonable; for reason itself demands that goodness of every kind should be found in God: and how should the passive and dependent forms of goodness be in the sovereign Ruler of the universe, if his Being were not manifold, if it did not include more "persons" than one?

Nor, in framing and holding this conception, do we call in question, we rather confirm the unity of God, as that holy and gifted divine, Thomas Erskine, has conclusively shewn. For *union* there must be more than one. Unity implies many lines running up into one centre, many threads woven into one pattern, many notes sounding in a single concord, many figures harmonized into a single composition, many members united in one body, many elements at accord

in a single nature, many persons drawn into one society and informed by one spirit. So that our most reasonable idea of God is this : that He is as a centre in which all forms of goodness meet and blend, the passive as well as the active, trust as well as bounty, obedience as well as authority. Nay, we most reasonably conceive the very *unity* of God when we maintain his *trinity*, when we think of the Divine Nature as including the Father and the Son, united by one and the selfsame Spirit, and as therefore dwelling together in an eternal concord of love.

Thus the first objection to the truth that "God was in Christ" may be logically met. Reason itself cannot account for the origin of many forms of moral goodness save as it admits the existence of an Eternal Son, dwelling in the bosom of the Father, and sharing one Spirit with Him.

(2.) Again, *Revelation* and *the Incarnation*, in which the revelation of God to men culminates, are no less reasonable than the doctrine of the Trinity. That God *has* spoken to men, that God *was* in Christ when He dwelt among us, accords with our best conceptions both of God and man. Remember, we have admitted that God is of a perfect goodness, that He is the Fountain of Charity ; that, in his manifold yet single Being, as Father, Son, and Spirit, He has the means of shewing forth all forms of love and goodness, passive as well as active, the goodness that trusts and suffers and obeys, no less than that which bestows gifts, and wins trust, and utters commands. Being of a perfect and complete goodness, holding his creatures in a boundless affection, is it not reasonable to believe that, if they need to see Him, He will shew Himself to them ; that, if they need to hear his voice, He will speak to them ? It is reasonable. Revelation is an easy inference from the Divine goodness. If it be requisite for our welfare, and for our highest welfare, that we should see and hear God, we may be sure that He will reveal Himself to us.

But *is* it requisite ?

We contend that it *was* requisite, that the welfare of the human race imperatively demanded the revelation of God. For man, by searching, cannot find out God to perfection. Though the Father of an infinite majesty has displayed his glory in the laws and phenomena of the physical universe, and has impressed his image on the soul of man ; though, by the *instructed* mind, his eternal power and Godhead may be clearly seen in the things that are made ; and though man was created in the likeness of God in a sense so high as to enable God to take the likeness of man, yet men were unable to discover Him, to be sure of Him, to draw near to Him in trust and love. By the mouth of its ablest and most cultivated sons, the ancient world confessed that it had not found God, though it had long groped after Him, if haply it might find Him. In all literature there is nothing more pathetic than the wail of despair which sounds through the utterances of the most gifted philosophers and poets of Greece and Rome. With one voice they confess that their quest after God had miserably failed. "*We must wait,*" they said, with Plato, "*for some one, be he god or inspired man, to take away the darkness from our eyes.*" They felt, therefore, that, though the well-being of man imperatively required the knowledge of God, men could not discover Him for themselves ; that this knowledge could only be attained as, in his own person, or through inspired men, God deigned to speak and to reveal Himself to mankind.

Consider, again, how men are touched and moved. Mere words have but comparatively little influence over us. Inferences, deductions, the whole train of logic may pass through our minds without once reaching the heart. We may be convinced that there is a God, and that He is wise and good, by arguments drawn from the facts of Nature and from the human story ; and yet no one of these arguments

shall kindle any flame of love in us, or elicit any response of reverence and affection. It is by actions, and actions which we can see and comprehend, that we are really kindled and moved. The cry of a child or the sigh of a woman touches us far more profoundly than the most cogent demonstration or the most eloquent harangue. The *sight* of an heroic deed fires and engrosses us as no mere description of even far greater heroism would do. So that, if we are to be moved by God, if we are to be kindled into a love for Him by which our evil lusts may be expelled, God must *shew Himself* to us. If the world is to be kindled into love for Him, and this love is to become its ruling affection, He must come and dwell in the world. He must be seen, and heard, and handled. He must do, under our very eyes, deeds of heroic love and self-sacrifice which we can never forget, never cease to honour and admire. He *has* come, He *has* dwelt among us, lived with us, died for us. God *was* in Christ, to meet our need, to reveal his kindness and love toward us and toward all men. The infirmity of *our* nature required his advent; the goodness of *his* nature prompted his advent. We needed Him, and He came. Men saw Him, and were conquered.

Was it not reasonable that He should come? Must not He who is all-wise and all-good satisfy the profoundest need of the creatures whom He made in his own image, after his own likeness; and satisfy it in the way most likely to move and impress and redeem them? If we may reason upward from the facts of Nature and human life to God as their cause, may we not also, having found in God the Fountain of all love and goodness, reason downward from Him to Revelation, and even to the Incarnation, as the necessary effects of his love to such creatures as we are in such a world as this?

(3.) Two of the main objections to the central doctrine of the Christian creed, "that God was in Christ, reconciling

the world unto Himself," have now been met. We have shewn, or attempted to shew, that it is reasonable to conceive of God as including in his single Being, Father, Son, and Spirit; and that it is reasonable to believe that He has come down to men in order to reveal Himself to them. Some arguments against the fact of a miraculous and supernatural Revelation have, indeed, still to be met; but these, for the moment, we pass by, in order to complete our present theme, by shewing that *the revelation of God attributed to the Man Christ Jesus is in entire accord with that conception of God which reason frames*. What that conception is we have seen. From the facts of the physical universe we have inferred that God is the Source of natural law, that it is He who, unseen, sits behind the veil of physical forces, causing all things to fulfil the laws which He has written on their being. From the facts of the human story we have inferred that He is the Power that makes for righteousness throughout the troubled history of our race. And from the facts of our own moral nature and experience we have inferred that He is the Divine Original of all love and goodness. These are the three leading conceptions of God which reason inducts from the facts it has laboriously gathered together, and classified, and reduced to logical order.

Are not these very conceptions brought home to us in the person and the work of Christ Jesus our Lord? By what is He distinguished, to the eye of reason, above his fellows, if not by his miracles, by his unsullied righteousness, and, above all, by his perfect self-sacrificing love?

Well, it is by his miracles that He is connected with the physical universe; it is by them that He proves Himself to be the unseen Force or Power which sits behind Nature, administering its laws. But here it will at once be objected that miracles are an infraction of all law. *Are they?* They may be, if we look at them by themselves. But admit for a

moment the whole Christian hypothesis, look, not at the miracles alone, but also at Him who works them; and is there anything unreasonable in them then? If the invisible God, who created and rules the universe, is to become visible, and to become visible for the express purpose of shewing men what He is, will He not, must He not, shew Himself to be the Lord of the universe by doing openly what He has hitherto done in secret, by *visible* creative acts instead of invisible, by making the law luminous and emphatic in the miracle? If God was in Christ, and in Christ that we might know Him as He is, then reason itself teaches us to expect creative, that is, miraculous acts from Him; reason itself teaches us to expect that He will shew Himself to be the Lord of the universe and of its laws. In fine, if God was in Christ, we should look to *see* in Christ the very supernatural power we know to be in God.

But, again, God is not only the Creator of the heavens and the earth; He is also the Power that makes for righteousness throughout the history of man. And was not this character of divinity revealed in "*Jesus Christ, the Righteous?*" Nothing is more certain than that Jesus was in very deed *a man*. It is a complete and perfect human life which moves before us in the Gospels. He was touched by the whole round of emotions by which we are moved—by sorrow and joy, by love and anger, by compassion and indignation. He was no celestial apparition hovering above or about the earth, but a very man—a man who was pained by the misconceptions of his friends and by the enmity of his foes, a man who was strengthened and refreshed by the fidelity of those whom He loved, and as He poured out his burdened heart in prayer to his Father and our Father, his God and our God.\*

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\* Both this and the following paragraph are, for the most part, a

And yet, though like us in all else, He was without sin. He was the perfect ideal Man. No shadow of selfishness ever obscured the pure mirror of his soul. Even the keen eyes of Satanic malice could find nothing in Him. Solicited and threatened on all sides, his mind never for a moment grew incorrect to Heaven, never wavered in its free adoption of the will of God. Selfishness, egotism, is the very essence of sin. In the last analysis sin means making the *Ego*, the self, the centre to which all things are to tend, instead of God. But the Man Christ Jesus never thought of Himself in that base sense—never thought of his own ease, his own interests, his own reputation. Throughout He held Himself at the service of God and man, and willingly sacrificed Himself that He might save the world. The judge who condemned Him pronounced Him faultless. The centurion who executed Him confessed, “Truly this was a righteous man.” We have only to look at the tender yet august Figure reflected in the glass of the Word to be sure that, once, at least, the world has seen that greatest of miracles, a man holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners! For the Evangelists are not content with simply affirming his unstained purity. They have portrayed his life in every aspect and relation, down to its minutest details; and we can find in it neither spot nor blemish. Nay, He Himself, confessedly the wisest and best of men, and though as men grow in wisdom they also grow more keenly sensible of the evil that is in them, never once uttered that pathetic confession of personal unworthiness and guilt which we hear from all pure lips but his. So far from confessing, He defied his very enemies to convict Him of a single sin. He taught us to pray for forgiveness, indeed, but He never prayed for it

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condensed translation of a passage in one of Dr. Luthardt's “Apologetic Lectures,” the reference to which I have lost.

Himself. In the darkest moment, when his unparalleled sorrows pressed most heavily upon Him, He never acknowledged that He had deserved them. Even in the hour and article of death, when the most innocent and the most holy lift up their hands to God and breathe out a prayer for pardon, He, too, prayed for forgiveness, but it was for his enemies, not for Himself. Righteous Himself, He was ever on the side of righteousness. None was so quick as He to discover the faintest germ of good in the "sinners" who came to Him confessing their sins, none so severe as He in rebuking those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others." While He dwelt among us did not his influence make for righteousness and against iniquity? And since He has gone up on high, what is the Power that, beyond all others, has told for righteousness throughout the world? Is it not the "grace of Jesus Christ our Lord?"

Once more, God is, as we have also seen, the Fountain of all love and goodness. And this love, this God of love, was not *He* revealed in Christ? The Cross of Christ is the symbol of a love stronger than death, a love that knew no bounds, even for the evil and the unthankful. Those who conceive of God as *exacting* instead of *making* an atonement for the sins of the world, those who conceive of the New Testament as revealing a God who was *not* in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, but as capable of the double injustice of condemning an innocent *man* in order to acquit the guilty, may well shrink from the God and the Atonement they suppose it to reveal. They may well fear to bring their theology to the bar of reason. But what have *we* to fear, we who believe that God, God Himself, no one less than God, was in Christ; that, in Him, God revealed once for all, in one crowning and supreme act, his eternal and unchangeable love for the sons of men? Is *that* unreasonable? Can any man who has learned from argument and induction

that the Creator must be infinitely better than his creatures, that He is the Divine Fountain from which all the love and self-sacrifice which are the glory of manhood flows : can any such believer in God shrink from the thought as irrational that, in Christ, God shewed a love which transcends all the force and tenderness of human love ? We, at least, do not see how he can. And, therefore, we call on as many as can say, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," to add, "and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord." We confidently affirm that, inasmuch as we find in Christ whatever reason teaches us there must be in God ; inasmuch as Christ shewed Himself to be the Lord of the universe, the Power that makes for righteousness, and the Love that is boundless and divine, reason itself bids us conclude that God was in Christ ; in Him, to reveal Himself to men, that He might satisfy the profound and incessant craving of their heart for Him.

### III. REVELATION.

But, reasonable as this conclusion seems to us, the fact of a miraculous and supernatural Revelation, such a revelation as the Bible contains, is utterly incredible to many thoughtful men, and that on various grounds.

(1.) They allege, for instance, that in his wisdom God has ordained for Himself certain laws, or invariable methods of action, which, though at times they bear hardly on this man or that, on this race or that, obviously subserve the welfare of the world at large, and that it is therefore unreasonable to suppose that He will interrupt or deviate from those laws. He reveals Himself, they say, and his eternal goodwill to men *by* those laws, and He cannot, or will not, break through them, however much we may need or desire to hear Him speaking more immediately to us.

To this objection we reply, that those who urge it surely assume a breadth and certainty of knowledge denied to "mortal man beneath the sky." For the question really in debate is—On what laws or principles does God conduct the moral government of the worlds He has made? But with how many of these worlds is even the wisest of men acquainted? Clearly he knows nothing of the moral government of any world but one, and that the world in which he lives. And of the moral government of *this* world he knows little except what he learns from the history of past ages. The ground covered by any man's personal experience is so small that he would prove himself an idiot rather than a sage were he to base universal conclusions upon it. If he would draw so much as a probable inference as to the laws by which even this world is governed, he must found it on the history, and on the whole history, of the world, so far as it has been preserved. But among the histories of the past there is one, and that the very one which confessedly handles all religious questions with an unrivalled force and nobility—a history extending over forty centuries, which persistently affirms Revelation to be a fact. No history has been so severely tested as this. None has so triumphantly borne every test to which it has been exposed. At this very moment the languages of ancient Egypt, Assyria, Phœnicia, and Moab are being recovered from the monuments that even Time, which devours all things, has failed to destroy; and as fast as the inscriptions with which they are crowded are deciphered they yield the most striking confirmation of the facts recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures.

These Scriptures, moreover, not only affirm the fact of Revelation, they also record the revelations which they affirm that God, in sundry measures and in divers manners, vouchsafed to men. And these revelations, so far as we are competent to assay and judge them, present every mark of a

Divine origin, and commend themselves to the conscience of men as the authentic words of God by the unparalleled nobility and purity of the truths they unfold.

Mark, then, how far our argument has led us. We had to determine, in general, on what laws or principles God conducts the moral government of worlds, and more especially whether or not Revelation, or direct disclosure of Himself, be one of those principles. We know nothing of the moral government of any world but our own, and of this we know only what we can learn from its recorded history. In the historical literature of the world one history confessedly stands pre-eminent for its power and beauty. This history affirms Revelation to be a principle or habit of God ; and, in the truths it professes to reveal, we possess, as all men acknowledge, the very noblest and highest religious conceptions which have found a home in the heart of man. So that when we bring the question to the scientific test of experience and observation, we have, at the lowest, a grave presumption in favour of the conclusion that the revelation of Himself to his intelligent creatures *is* one of the laws or principles on which God conducts the moral government of the worlds He has made.

Is it reasonable, then, is it scientific, to reject this conclusion, the conclusion, be it remembered, of observation and experience, on the high *à priori* ground that, as God governs by fixed laws, it is impossible that He should come forth from his place to instruct his creatures in the counsels of his will? Men of science, not without cause, profoundly distrust *à priori* arguments. They constantly appeal from them to facts, and insist that the facts shall be left to tell their own tale, and not be forced to support a foregone conclusion. They appeal to facts : to facts, then, let them go. The facts say that for at least forty out of the sixty historic centuries God did reveal Himself to men ; they affirm that to secure

the spiritual welfare of man He has shone through the veil of intermediate causes and effects, in order that in his light we might see light.

The reasonableness of this conclusion is admitted by the highest scientific authority, that of Professor Tyndall himself, who acknowledges that "*it is no departure from scientific method to place behind natural phenomena a universal Father who, in answer to the prayers of his children, alters the currents of these phenomena.*" True, the learned Professor adds that this theory is only a theory till it be tested and verified in the region of sensible observation and experience; but he admits that the conception is in entire harmony with the scientific method of thought: and, as we have shewn, the conception *has been* tested and verified, unless, indeed, we are to reject as a fable, not only the spiritual experience of the whole Christian Church, but also the one literature which has been exposed to the hottest fire of the critical ordeal, and has come forth from it substantially uninjured, although the smell of the fire may yet linger on some of its garments.

(2.) But if Revelation be a scientific inference from history, and an easy deduction from the goodness of God and the need of man, it may be asked "Why, then, does not God reveal Himself to every man that cometh into the world? Why is Revelation limited to sundry times, all of which are past, and to a single race, which race, moreover, no longer hears a voice we cannot hear, nor sees visions that we cannot see? It surely is but reasonable to expect that, if God should speak to men, and speak to them on themes in which their highest welfare is involved, the revelation will be universal and constant, that it will not be withheld from any one of us."

In meeting this objection it would not be fair to urge that, in some sense, God does reveal Himself to every man that cometh into the world, that He is not far from any one of

us; nor to insist on the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, promised and vouchsafed to as many as believe: for these inward and spiritual revelations differ widely from the revelation sent by the prophets and apostles who spake as they were moved by the Spirit of God. We meet it rather with the simple answer that it is utterly and demonstrably unscientific. What text is there on which men of science love more to dwell, or on which they grow more eloquent, than on the admirable blending of economy with bounty which they everywhere discover in the natural world; the patience, and long patience, with which the Maker of all works out his beneficent designs? A God never hasting and never resting, suffering no lack yet permitting no waste, this is the God in whom, if they believe in God at all, they delight themselves. If, then, in his work of revealing Himself to men, God is to display the economy and patience which characterize all the other operations of his hands, we should not expect that He would be for ever breaking through the veil of cause and effect, which commonly at once hides Him from and reveals Him to men, as though He were impatient to shine forth in his full glory and to compel the admiration of his creatures. We should rather expect that He would select one man, and then one race, to be the recipients and exponents of the truth; that He would wait patiently while the one man grew and multiplied into a race, all more or less leavened with the truth He had revealed, and again wait patiently till, by gradual and advancing disclosures of his will, He had prepared the select race to receive the truth in its fulness, and to become his ambassadors to the other races of the world. The law of economy, which rules in all his other works, prescribed this thrift and patience in the work of Revelation. While, on the other hand, the limitations of the human intellect, man's slowness of heart to believe and to rise into higher beliefs, necessitated it.

(3.) But here we may be met by an objection of a different kind. "Granting," it may be said, "that reason would teach us to look for the election of one race to the post and function of religious teacher to the world, is there any need to assume a divine revelation, an immediate and supernatural disclosure of Himself by God, to this elect people? May not a race have been created with, or trained into, a special aptitude for the discovery and promulgation of religious truth? May not the Hebrew Scriptures be the natural and unaided product of the Semitic mind? We know that the superior races of the Oriental world are characterized by a singular religious susceptibility and power, and that the great religious books of the world have been written by them. Why, then, should we not accept the Hebrew Scriptures as the natural production of this strange religious susceptibility and power, and as none the less the gift of God because they are the work of man?"

In certain quarters this argument of the Oriental, and more particularly of the *Semitic mind*, finds great favour, and is constantly urged in a tone of conviction, if not of triumph. Nevertheless, if, still pursuing the scientific method, we appeal to facts, the facts, so far from sustaining the argument, point to the opposite conclusion. It is very true that, on the great mountains and plains and deserts of the East, where the forces of Nature display themselves with a terrible sublimity which compels men to take refuge in God, there grew up a race of men peculiarly open to religious impressions, and with a strange capacity both for uttering truth in noble and simple forms, and for passionately devoting themselves to the service and propagation of religion; and, as the Ruler and Teacher of men ever adapts his means to his end, we might reasonably assume that He would select the nation by which he intended to give his truth to the world

from this specially gifted race, choosing minds naturally religious to be the ambassadors and champions of religious truth.

So far, therefore, we can cheerfully adopt the argument of the Semitic mind. But when it is pushed beyond this point, when we are asked to see in the Hebrew mind, not only the organ, but the origin, of religious truth, not only the channel through which it flowed, and which gave it form and colour, but also the spring from which it rose, we take leave to demur, at least till we have consulted the facts. There are other products of the Semitic mind with which, before we arrive at our conclusion, it is but reasonable that we should compare the Hebrew Scriptures; the book of Tobit, for example, the history of Susanna and the Elders, Bel and the Dragon, the Talmud, and the Koran. Nay, there are still other products of the Oriental mind in general, at which we shall do well to glance; as, for instance, the Hindu Vedas, and the Persian Zendavesta. Now any man acquainted, however slightly, with the more ancient songs of the Vedas, or with the Gâthâs of the Zendavesta, or with many of the sentences and parables of the Talmud, or with the finer *suras* of the Koran, who should deny that they are characterized by an amazing beauty and religious elevation of tone, would simply put himself out of court as an utterly incompetent critic and judge. We are very far from denying, we are glad to believe that they all contain "broken rays" from the Light that lighteth every man. But, on the other hand, any man who can compare the Vedas, or the Zendavesta, or the Talmud, or the Koran, or even the Hebrew apocryphal literature, *as a whole*, with the canonical Scriptures *as a whole*, and not feel that the Scriptures are a whole heaven above the other religious products of the Semitic or the Oriental mind, must be a man so insensible to the power of truth and to the most obvious distinctions of literary form

and value as to render his verdicts wholly worthless. The more we study the other great religious books of the world, however much we find in them to admire, the more firmly we shall be persuaded that nothing short of the inspiration of God can account for the unapproachable sublimity and power of those Scriptures in which we think and know that we have eternal life.

(4.) But, again, if a revelation be granted, it may still be urged: "Surely the perfect God would only reveal Himself in perfect forms. Do you claim perfection for the Scriptures, then, and for all of them? Do you assert that there are no defects in them, whether in form or substance?—that from the earliest to the latest they present religious truth in its absolute forms?"

We assert nothing of the kind. We admit, with St. Paul, that we have the heavenly treasure in earthen vessels. We confess, with Christ, that in the earlier Scriptures there are concessions to human weakness, laws given "for the hardness of their hearts," who received them, because they were the best practicable, not because they were the absolute best. We acknowledge the more excellent glory of the truth and grace which came by Jesus Christ. And we contend that this gradual and progressive method of revelation, this advance from less to more, is precisely the method which commends itself to reason as appropriate and divine. Does not science discover this law of development in all the works of God, in the creation and history of the earth itself, in its *flora* and *fauna*, in the history of separate races of men, and in that of the collective race? Does not science, in these latter days, tend irresistibly to the theory of evolution or development as the sole key to all the changes through which the world has passed, and all that it contains, even to man himself,—reducing all vital forces, whether of plant or animal, to a common primary tissue variously organized, and resolving even this organic

tissue into the acids, phosphates, and salts of the inorganic world?

Well, we claim this law of development for the revelation which God has made to men. We say it was to be expected, it accords with reason, that God should give his truth to men as they were able to receive it; that He should advance from the rudimentary to the more advanced stages, from the first elements to the last perfect disclosure of his will. And, as in the earlier stages of development all things are comparatively imperfect, though at the same time they may be exquisitely adapted to the elements and conditions in which they move, we must not look for perfect history in the unhistoric ages of the world, nor for a perfect morality in the *unmoral* or the *immoral* ages. We can and do claim for the early histories of the Bible a clearness and an accuracy which far transcend those of any contemporary race,—a claim which will not be questioned by the scholars who are familiar with the ancient theories of the genesis of the earth and of man, or who are even now painfully deciphering and patching together the inscriptions graven on the monuments of Assyria and the papyri of Egypt. We can and do claim for the legislation of Moses a morality far in advance of the other codes of the antique world, and exquisitely adapted to the moral condition and needs of those to whom it was sent. But we do not affirm the literal accuracy of every “book,” or genealogical table, contained in the Pentateuch; nor do we assert that the morality of Moses was as high and broad and pure as that of Christ; we neither recommend any modern historian to quote his authorities as the Old Testament is quoted in the New, nor advise that the imprecations of some of the Hebrew psalmists should be taken on Christian lips. In short, we admit the moral and historical imperfections of the ancient Scriptures, in so far as they are or may be proved; and we attribute

them to that method of development which reason confesses to be characteristic of all Divine processes. If the revelation of God had *not* been progressive, when should we have heard the last of it? If it had not advanced through lower to higher stages, men of science would have been the first to mark this deviation from the ways of God, and would have found, in its instant and unaccountable perfection, a still more cogent reason for rejecting it than they now find in its imperfections, confessed or alleged.

(5.) But even when Revelation has been granted as reasonable, it may still further be objected:—

“Surely, when God speaks to men, He will so speak as that they may understand. The revelation may be progressive, it may be given only at sundry times, and not to divers peoples; but, so far as it goes, it will at least be clear, level to the understanding of those to whom it is vouchsafed. There will be no mystery about it, no esoteric or hidder truths. And yet, how much is there in the Old Testament of which the Jews did not lay hold, and of which it was not to be expected that they should lay hold; and how much is there in the New Testament which the primitive disciples did not comprehend, and of which the most different views are held even to the present day. *We* indeed can find the doctrine of a suffering Messiah in the Old Testament Scriptures; but how should the Jews have found it when He was constantly held up before them with a crown of victory on his head? *We* can see that the prophets and psalmists emphatically affirmed obedience to be better than sacrifice; but how should the Jews have seen it, when so much and constant stress was laid on the duty of sacrifice? *We* can see that the primitive disciples were mistaken, in hoping to behold a second advent of the Lord before they saw death; but who that marks how Christ and his apostles spake of that advent can wonder that they fell into the mistake?

We can see that the elect race was elected, not for its own sake, but for the benefit of the world; but can we marvel that the Jews held themselves to be the favourites of Heaven? And that doctrine of future retribution, taught in both Testaments—who even yet can say, exactly and authoritatively, what it means? Many still adhere to the conception of an everlasting torture as the due reward of sins committed in the fleeting moments of time, which, on the mere face of it, at least *seems* a monstrous injustice; while others stoutly maintain that no such dogma is taught in the Scriptures, whether of the Old Testament or the New. If, then, the Bible be, or contain, the Word of God, how comes it to pass that its apparent meaning is not always its true meaning; that, on questions so momentous as these, it utters so uncertain a sound?"

Our reply to this objection, which has, it must be confessed, a somewhat formidable face, is simply another appeal to the facts and teachings of science. *Do the phenomena of the natural world always carry their true meaning on their very front? Are they* all perfectly simple, and capable of an instant and accurate interpretation? Does not the immense value of a scientific training consist in this,—that it teaches us to distinguish between the things which *are* and the things which do *appear*? that it compels us to ask, again and again, what, and what manner of thing the phenomena around us do signify? The sun *seems* to travel round the earth; but *does* it? The stars *seem* minute specks of light; but *are* they? The cowries found on the summit of the Alps *seem* to have been created there, or, as the Crusaders thought, to have been deposited there by the Deluge; but *were* they? The simple fact is that the first and obvious interpretations of men of science have hardly ever been anywhere near the mark. The first astronomical readings of the heavens, and the first geological readings of the earth,

long since corrected by fuller knowledge, are but familiar instances of the way in which science has advanced through erroneous to more accurate conceptions of the works of God. Nowhere is the absolute truth found on the surface. Nothing is what it *seems*,—not even light, or heat, or motion, or sound.

If, then, in all the works of God we find an inviting mystery which beckons us on to an ever deeper research, and which rewards our research with knowledge ever more accurate and complete, should we not expect to find a similar mystery in the words through which God reveals Himself to men? Is it not most reasonable that here too we should meet with phenomena which may mislead us if we hastily theorize upon them, and which will yield their secret only to humble, patient, and wise inquiry? It surely is reasonable, most reasonable. The very mysteries of the Divine Word are but another proof that the Word is from Him who made and rules the universe. That the Jews should have found their conception of a victorious Messiah in the very Scriptures from which we derive our conception of a suffering Messiah is no whit more strange than that the Ptolemaic and Copernican systems should have been inferred from the same astronomical facts. That there should be in the Bible mysteries which are variously interpreted, and problems which we cannot even yet conclusively solve, is no more a proof that the Bible did not come from God than the mysteries and unsolved problems of Nature are a proof that the worlds were not made by God. Rather, the existence of similar mysteries and unsolved, if not insoluble, problems in both affords a strong presumption that both are the work of one and the self-same Hand.

Thus, though far too hastily and imperfectly, I have endeavoured to shew how the very central and fundamental

truths of the Christian Creed may be so presented as to commend themselves even to the inquisitive and sceptical faculty of reason. And, in prosecuting this endeavour, I trust I have made it plain that I neither relinquish for myself, nor desire others to relinquish, any particle of "the faith once delivered to the saints." All our fathers regarded the circle of Christian doctrine from the point of view at which their several ages stood; and we shall but follow their example if, while looking steadfastly at the same sacred circle of doctrine, we shift our point of view with the shifting time, and adopt the method of thought in vogue with the men of our day and generation. Indeed, it is only by these changes of method and points of view that the Church enlarges her conceptions of the truths common to all ages, and makes them at once more accurate and more complete.

And what do, what can, we lose by presenting "the truth as it is in Jesus," to a reasoning and sceptical age, in its more reasonable and convincing aspects? The truth remains the same, whatever our point of view and however our theological formulas may change; just as the astronomical facts remain the same, and men may rejoice in the light and heat of the sun, whatever their theories of the solar system. We still have a God of righteousness and love as the Maker of heaven and earth, and as the gracious Ruler of men; a God who, in his single Being, includes Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; a God who, that He might reveal Himself to men, inspired the holy prophets to declare his will, and, in the person of his Son, came down and dwelt among us; a God who, in the exceeding greatness of his love to usward, has Himself made a sacrifice for the sin of the world, that He might reconcile the world unto Himself. We lose no jot or tittle of these truths by speaking of them in a reasonable way and in accordance with the scientific method of thought. And if we lose nothing, how much may we gain by so speak-

ing of them as to shew that they accord with reason, though they also transcend it? With what added power do we appeal to men when we have first convinced ourselves and them of the utter reasonableness of that of which we speak and whereof we affirm, when we are fully persuaded that in beseeching them, as they believe in God, to believe also in Christ. Reason combines with Religion to enforce our prayer?

## XXIII.

## God a Consuming Fire.

HEBREWS xii. 29.

IN many passages of Holy Writ God is set before us, not only as a fire, but as a consuming fire. And at first, as we consider any one of these passages, we are likely to be perplexed and distressed ; we shall be apt to say : “ Fire is the first thing we are taught to fear ; God is the first person we are taught to love : how, then, can *He* be like *that* ? Better have no God than worship a consuming fire ! for who may dwell with the devouring flame ? who with everlasting burnings ? All the sweet and gracious ministries of Nature, all the larger aspects of Providence, all the profoundest intuitions of Humanity, and, as we have been wont to read them, all the revelations of Scripture, assure us that He is not an implacable enemy, but a gracious Friend ; that He is not a burning and fatal anger, but the Love which sits at the centre of the universe, vivifying and sustaining all things. How, then, *can* our God be a consuming fire ? ”

But surely a little further consideration will shew us that “ fire,” as a symbol of the Divine Nature, is a most happy and expressive symbol. For if fire is the first thing we are taught to fear, do we not early learn to love it too ? Do we not gladly gather round the hearth and spread our hands to its fostering warmth ? Is not “ the hearth ” a familiar synonym for “ the home ” ? is not “ the home ” the name for all that we hold most precious and dear ?

Fire destroys ; but it destroys the dead wood to comfort the living man. It only burns *us* when we handle it wrongly or foolishly. Fire is one day, we are told, to consume the very elements of which heaven and earth are woven ; but it is only that a new fairer heaven and a new happier earth may come forth from the old earth and heaven as they pass away. Fire burns and destroys ; nevertheless it is so much our friend, human civilization and progress and comfort depend so utterly upon it, that the wise Greeks fabled of one who was man and yet more than man, and who, in the greatness of his love for the human race, stole fire from the gods, and was content to endure an immortal agony that he might draw down this sovereign good from heaven to earth.

Fire is a destructive agent, but it is also a creative, vivifying, conservative agent. Through the broad reaches of geological time, fire gave form to the very earth on which we dwell and prepared it for the habitation of man, flinging up the great mountain ranges, crystallising the rocks, nourishing the mighty forests which, as they decayed, composed the fertile soils that yield us bread. The electric fire, which at times flashes from and through the clouds, by its latent energies holds all things in being ; it is the secret mysterious force which lies at the very heart of life and maintains the balanced order of the universe. The solar fire, flaming down upon us from the face of the sun, year by year makes the valleys laugh with corn, and feeds the hungry world.

If, therefore, fire consumes and destroys, it also creates and vivifies and nourishes. Its daily task, its common work, is not destructive, but most serviceable and benignant. Day by day, and year by year, in innumerable forms, it is silently at work, quickening and sustaining the world, feeding, civilizing, comforting men. It roars in a thousand furnaces, and shines on a million hearths, to serve and comfort us. It passes, like a vital stream, through all the arteries and veins

of the universe. It looks down upon us from the benignant sun, sending us rain and fruitful seasons, rejoicing over the abundance it creates. So that when we find God compared to a fire, we have to remember, first, that though fire consumes, it consumes that which is dead in order to feed and nourish the living : we have to remember, secondly, that though fire burns and destroys, it also gives life, conserves life, supports life : we have to remember, thirdly and mainly, that, while destruction is but the occasional and accidental effect of fire, its real and constant task is to quicken and cherish and bless. Remembering these qualities of fire, it will no longer surprise or pain us to hear that God is a fire. We shall rather rejoice in the happy symbol, and say, "To God, as to fire, we owe more than we can tell." Our feeling toward fire, when we rightly consider it, is a blended fear and love, in which, however, love largely prevails over fear ; and should not our feeling toward God blend fear and love, though our love should be far more than our fear ? Day by day we warm ourselves at the fire, and eat the bread which it has both ripened and baked for us ; it is only now and then, only in the night, that we dread lest it should burn us. And thus also we should daily draw near to God, to be warmed into fresh life and activity by the eternal fire of his eternal love, and to be nourished by its fruits ; although at times, in the night of our sin and grief, we are apt to dread lest his wrath should kindle upon us, and put us to sore pain, even though it do not consume and destroy us.

Thus interpreted, fire becomes a very welcome symbol of the character of God. But can we fairly welcome it, and rest upon the conception of the Divine Nature it suggests, when God is placed before us in Scripture, not only as a fire, but as a *consuming* fire, as a *destroying* fire ? I think we may welcome this reading of the symbol if only we bear

well in mind that it has a terrible as well as an encouraging and benignant aspect. The love of God is no weak pulling sentiment, but a masculine, nay, a divine affection, which, for their good, can bear to inflict pain, and even the worst extremities of pain, on those whom it embraces. And it is very necessary for us to remember that we may either warm ourselves at the fire of this Divine Love or let its flame kindle upon us and become as the fuel which feeds it. However much of goodness there may be in us through the teaching and grace of God, there is even in the best of us that which must be burned up—faults, trespasses, evil inclinations and desires which imperatively demand the fire. And if when the fire of Divine Love kindles upon our sins and sinful habits, in order that we may become pure, we will not let them go, what can happen but that *we* shall be burned, as well as our sins, until we can no longer retain them? On the other hand, if, when in his holy love God calls us to pass through fiery trials, we willingly cast away from us the besetting sins which He has devoted to destruction, and from which we ourselves have often prayed to be redeemed, one like unto the Son of God will walk the furnace with us—for was not even *He* made perfect by the things which He suffered? and we shall pass out of it, not only unburned, but transformed into his likeness.

Thus far, however, I have simply argued from analogy, simply drawn out the suggestions of the symbol in which God is set before us. The argument has been: God is a fire: the fire is our constant and most serviceable friend, though it may be turned to be our foe: and therefore God, though we may compel Him to be as an enemy to us, is nevertheless our constant and benignant Friend. And it may be that, while following this argument, your assent to it has been somewhat stayed and troubled by an uneasy

impression that the Bible makes a very different use of this symbol; that, when it speaks of God as a fire, it takes a much more stern and threatening tone; that it yields very little support to those happier sides of the analogy on which I have dwelt. To ascertain the value of this impression, or, rather, that we may be moved to cast it away from us once for all, let us glance at the leading Scriptures in which God is spoken of as a fire, or as a consuming fire, and learn what they really teach of his character and rule.

The first passage in which this comparison occurs is by far the most important, as it is the root from which most similar passages have grown. In Exodus xxiv. we read that when the Israelites, in their wanderings in the Wilderness, arrived at Mount Sinai, the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, with seventy of the elders, to ascend the mountain, that they might behold his glory. They climbed the mountain; "they saw the God of Israel." Moses was selected for a clearer vision of the Divine Holiness and Beauty. He had to leave his brethren, to ascend a loftier summit, to enter the clouds in which the Glory of God abode. And, we are told, "the sight of the glory of the Lord was *like devouring fire* on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel." The Divine Glory was like a devouring fire; but did it devour Moses? Nay, He dwelt amid the blazing lightnings, which stabbed the thick clouds hanging round the top of the mountain, forty days; yet He came forth from them not only unharmed, but so transfigured and glorified that the people could not endure the intolerable splendours of a face which had so long been lifted to the face of God. Even the seventy elders "saw God and did eat and drink;" *i.e.*, they saw God and lived. But the people could not so much as touch the base of the mountain on which the Glory burned. Rude, and passionate, and stained with sin, the Glory, which to the elders seemed

like that of a kindled sapphire, "as it were the body of heaven in its clearness" when all its cloud garments are swept away, appeared to the people as "a devouring fire." Yet even they were *not* devoured by it; even these gross unspiritual slaves, to whom it was death to approach the lower slopes of the mountain on the summit of which the Divine Majesty shone, and to whom it seemed a mere destructive blaze piercing the dark cloud, were not destroyed by it. The Glory which to their weak unpurged vision seemed so intolerable came, not to consume them, but to bless them in turning them away from their iniquities. For why did God reveal Himself to Moses, save that He might give him a law, and appoint a sacrifice, and ordain a ritual, for the whole people? Moses beheld the Divine Glory only that *they* might behold it in due time: *he* talked face to face with God that *they* might know God to be their Friend. He is sanctified that he may be taught how to sanctify them. He ascends the Mount of Communion that they may hereafter follow in his steps. So that, though God appeared to men as a consuming fire, it was not to consume but to redeem them, not to devour them but to quicken and nourish them by his word.

As his end approached, Moses recalled this wonderful scene on Mount Sinai; and in his farewell address to the people (Deut. iv. 10—24), recounting all the steps by which God had led them and the statutes He had given them "that they might live," he reminds them of the mountain which burned with fire. He bids them remember how, "when the Lord spake to them out of the midst of the fire," they "heard the voice of words, but saw no similitude," and urges them that they make to themselves no similitude, or image, or likeness of God, lest they provoke Him to anger: "for," he concludes, "*the Lord thy God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*" But even when this fire kindles upon them,

are they to lose all hope ? No ; even when they *have* made to themselves images and similitudes of the invisible God, even when by their idolatries they have provoked Him to anger, yet even then, Moses assures them (verses 29—31), if they “seek unto the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul,” if, “when they are in tribulation, they turn to Him and are obedient unto his voice . . . the Lord thy God will not forsake thee, nor destroy thee.” God is a consuming fire, then ; but this fire burns only against and upon the sins by which men wrong and degrade their own souls ; so soon as they forsake their sins, the consuming heat changes into a comfortable nourishing warmth.

The grand terrible scene which accompanied the giving of the Law, the thick cloud which hung over Sinai, the lightnings which blazed through the cloud, the storm which rolled and echoed among the stern granite peaks, profoundly impressed the national imagination, and passed, as was natural and inevitable, from their chronicles to their songs. To the Psalmists or poets of Israel that scene became a constant inspiration ; it recurs again and again in their psalms. Thus, for instance, in Psalm l. we read, “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence ; *a fire shall devour before Him*, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him.” Here, though the scene is transferred from Sinai to Zion, it is obvious that the Psalmist had in his thoughts the manifestation of the Divine Glory made to his fathers in the Desert. Now, as then, the Lord is to come and shine on Israel—to come in fire and tempest. But, though He comes in fire and tempest, He comes not to destroy, but to reprove, to teach, and to glorify his people ; to reprove them for their vain oblations, to teach them to offer Him the sacrifices of obedience and thanksgiving, to glorify them with his salvation.

It is only the incorrigibly wicked, who "hate instruction" and love iniquity, that are threatened with the burning heat of the Divine indignation: and even these (verses 22, 23) are warned to "consider" their ways, to offer praise and to order their conversation aright, that they also may see the salvation of God.

In Psalm xcvii., which is probably of a much later date, these reminiscences of Sinai are cast into a still more impressive form. The throne of God moves out of its accustomed place as the Almighty arises for judgment. Clouds and darkness roll before and around it. Out of the dark rolling clouds there shoots "*a fire which burneth up his enemies round about.*" But as we gaze through the Poet's eyes on this scene of majesty and terror, we see that the heavy clouds of judgment soon pass. "Light springs up for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Through all the turmoil of the tempest God has "preserved the souls of his saints;" and now that the heavens are once more clear and bright they "rejoice in the Lord, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness." Nay, the whole broad earth rejoices because "the Lord reigneth," "and the multitude of the isles are glad."

Indeed the constant teaching of these sweet singers of Israel is, that the hour of darkness is but brief and its power straightly restrained. At times, because He loves men and hates the sins which destroy them, God comes in tempest and fire. The tempest is terrible, the angry lightnings carry death; but the heaven of mercy soon clears, and over the broader spaces of the earth the gracious sun shines every day, with a warmth in which all good growths thrive and yield their fruit. Purified and refreshed by the very tempest which threatened to destroy it, the earth smiles into new beauty, the birds break out into sweeter songs, and all the air grows calm and tender and fragrant.

And the Prophets take one tone with the Psalmists. With these, too, judgment is God's strange work; mercy and goodness the daily habit of his love. Take Isaiah as an illustration. In his prophecy we read (Chap. lxvi. verses 15, 16), "Behold, the Lord will come *with fire*, and with a whirlwind for his chariot, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke in flames; *for by fire and by sword will the Lord plead with all flesh*, and the slain of the Lord shall be many." Now if, as is too much our habit, we take these words by themselves, we may well despair of finding any gracious meaning in them, or of reconciling them with our belief that God is love. But if, as we are bound to do, we limit and interpret them by their context, we shall find them full of grace and tenderness. For we then learn that the fiery "indignation of the Lord" is to kindle only on his "adversaries," only on those who *will* be his enemies though He is their friend, only on those who will not hear when He speaks, nor answer when He calls, however often and tenderly He invites them to come to Him, and trust in Him, that they may find rest to their souls. All who listen to his voice are to be glad; their peace is to "flow like a river;" they are to be comforted of God "as one whom his mother comforteth." And they are to rejoice and be glad, not simply because they are safe and comforted with peace, but because God will send them to interpret his judgments and to "declare his glory among the Gentiles;" because He will make them the "priests" of the human race, and so bless their ministry that "from one moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, *all flesh* shall come and worship before Him." The fire and the sword are to plead with all flesh, therefore, only in order that all flesh may see the salvation of God.

Finally, this conception of God as a consuming fire, which seems so harsh and repellant, but is so gracious and in-

viting, and which, as we have seen, pervades every section of the Old Testament, also finds place in the New Testament. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we once more hear of God as a consuming fire (Chap. xii. ver. 29); yet there is no terror in the symbol if we regard it from the inspired writer's point of view. He is exhorting us to take patiently the scourgings and chastenings of the Lord. In these chastenings we are to find keen, but conclusive, proofs that we are the sons of God, since "the Lord scourgeth every son whom He receiveth,"—not however, for his pleasure, but for our profit, and that we may become partakers of his holiness. *We* indeed are not come to the Mount which burned with fire, but to Mount Zion, whose summit is crowned with the city of the living God, not with blackness and darkness and tempest. We do not stand beneath a frowning heaven, on a darkened and trembling earth, but in "a kingdom which cannot be moved" even when heaven and earth are shaken. Nevertheless, "*our* God," like the God whose glory burned on Sinai, "is a consuming fire," searching out all our secret evils and hidden lusts, burning them out of us, that we may be perfect before Him.

Are we, then, to shrink from Him, to fear and quake exceedingly so often as He draws nigh to reveal Himself to us? Nay, we are rather to "serve Him with reverence and godly fear;" we are to endure with patience and hope the fiery trials by which alone He can make us holy as He is holy, and perfect as He is perfect; we are to believe that, however grievous and painful our trials may be for the present, they are imposed on us simply because they "yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby." In the New Testament as in the Old, God is a consuming fire, but a fire which burns up only that which is base and worthless in us and in the world, that it

may quicken, develop, mature all that is good and noble and pure.

Here, then, we have before us the leading passages of Holy Writ in which God is compared to a devouring or consuming fire. And however harsh and terrible they may have seemed to us, however repugnant to our conception of God as the God of all grace, do they any longer convey harsh and repugnant suggestions to us now that we have read them in their several connexions and seen what they really mean? Do they not rather confirm all the gracious analogies and conclusions we drew at the outset from the mere symbol itself? If we can say of fire, that it is not an implacable enemy, but a constant and benignant friend; that it never becomes our enemy till we abuse it; that we use it and love it far more than we fear it; that it consumes that which is dead to warm and serve the living; that it holds all things in being and in order; that, if it destroys, it also quickens, and nourishes, and conserves; that to destroy is only its occasional and accidental work, while to vivify and preserve and nourish is its common task: if we can say all this of fire, can we not also say it of God, and of the love of God as revealed in Holy Scripture? Is not *He* our gracious friend till we compel Him to become our enemy? Is not our love toward Him, should it not be, more than our fear? Does not He seek to consume our dead works and evil lusts only that He may liberate and feed and strengthen that in us which truly lives? If He sometimes destroys, does He not commonly quicken, and nourish, and conserve? Is not destruction only his strange occasional work, while his constant task from day to day is to vivify and cherish? Is not his anger but for a moment, while his mercy endureth for ever?

“Our God *is* a consuming fire: shall we not therefore

rejoice and be glad? nay, call upon the earth and the multitude of the isles to share our joy? Are there not innumerable evils in our hearts which we have vainly attempted to subdue and destroy? Are there not innumerable evils in the world which no human strength will suffice to extirpate? What, then, can be more full of comfort and hope for us than to learn that at the centre of the universe there burns a sacred fire of Divine Love to which all these intolerable but unconquerable evils will be as stubble? What greater consolation to our defeated and oppressed hearts than to know that God will prove Himself strong against the evils before which we are so weak; that, sinful as we are, He will yet make us complete in holiness; that, though the world be all marred and stained by sin and its foul brood, He will yet purge and renew it?

It may be that there are some who will never listen, however often He speaks, never answer, however graciously He calls, who will never profit, whether by the severe or the tender ministries of his love. And these, cleaving to their sins, may be consumed with the sins they would not let go. What then? To be evil is to be most miserable. For those who *will be* evil, what greater mercy can be shewn than that they should be destroyed out of their miseries, consumed by the Love from which they will accept no higher boon? It may be that *we* must pass through many fiery trials before we become holy as God is holy, and perfect as He is perfect. But shall we not rejoice in tribulation also, and even in being tried as gold and silver are tried, if only at last we come out of the furnace pure metal, capable of being fashioned into "vessels of honour" for the palace of the Great King? It may be that *the world* must pass through bitter and long-protracted agonies of suffering and strife before the kingdom of our God and of his Christ can fully come. But shall we not give thanks that to the world, as to us, our God is a con-

suming fire—consuming that He may purify and conserve, shaking heaven and earth that he may bring in the kingdom that cannot be shaken? Shall we not all join in the prayer: “O sacred Fire of Love, which first burns up all that is evil, and then shines forth in sevenfold glory on all that has been made good, dwell Thou in our hearts, and in all hearts, that we, with all the world, may dwell for ever amid the healing transfiguring splendours of Thy grace!”

## XXIV.

## Great Reverses a Test of Character.

ST. JAMES i. 9, 10.

“ **L**ET the brother who is of low degree rejoice in that he is lifted up; but the rich, in that he is brought low.”

For all so simple as it sounds, this passage has much exercised and perplexed the students of the Word. And, indeed, most of us a little shrink from taking it in its plain natural sense. Taken simply as it stands, it seems to teach, first, that the poor man is to be very glad when he is made rich—not a very difficult duty, perhaps; and, then, that the rich man is to be no less glad when his riches use their wings and fly away—a duty so difficult that most men hold it to be impossible. Even the Commentators hesitate to demand so lofty a strain of virtue in the name of Christ; which surely is very disinterested of the Commentators: for as they are for the most part poor and toilworn men, one should have thought that *they* at least would have found this passage very simple and pleasant, and have been quite willing to see rich men grow poor that poor men might grow rich.

Nor do they stand alone. Hardly any man ventures to take St. James as really meaning what he seems to mean—viz., that the poor good man is to rejoice when wealth comes to him, and that the rich good man is to rejoice when his wealth leaves him. Most of us take him to mean that the exaltation in which the poor brother is to rejoice is a *spiritual* exaltation, that he is to be glad because, though he may be low in the world's esteem, he stands high among the saints and

is rich toward God ; and that, in like manner, the abasement in which the rich brother is to rejoice is a spiritual abasement,—he is to be glad that, despite his opulence, he is of a lowly and contrite heart. All which may be very true, but surely is not the truth taught here. For observe what we must do in order to get this meaning from St. James's words. We must take one half of each of his phrases in its natural, and the other half in a non-natural, sense ; one half literally, and the other half figuratively. When he says “ brother of low degree,” we must take him to mean a poor man of no social mark, not a brother very deficient in the graces of the Spirit ; but when he speaks of the poor brother as being “ lifted up,” we are not to understand him as meaning that the poor man is lifted out of his poverty ; we are to put a spiritual sense into the words, and read them to mean that he is raised to an immaterial wealth. When he says “ rich brother,” we are to take him as describing a man opulent in this world's goods ; but so soon as he speaks of the rich man's “ abasement,” we are to understand, not that the rich man is brought down to penury, but that his heart is humbled, his spirit brought down.

Now if we read the inspired words in this double sense, if we take one part of a sentence in one way and the other part in another way, we make the Bible mean anything—that is, nothing. We shall never be sure that we have the mind of the Spirit ; we shall make every Scripture “ of a private interpretation ; ” we shall each of us carry about his own Biblical key, and construe every passage to our own mind. We can only read the Inspired Volume to profit as we seek first the plain obvious meaning of its words, and are guided by that, however sharply it may cut our prejudices against the grain. Read fairly and simply, I am bold to say that the words of St. James cannot fail to carry this single sense to our minds : that the Christian brother

who is poor in this world's goods is to be glad when he gets rich in this world's goods ; and that the Christian brother who is rich in lands or money is to be glad when God takes them away from him.

St. James is the plainest, the least subtle and mystical, of the New Testament writers. He uses words in their simplest sense, and forms them into pithy downright sentences. He says what he means, and means what he says, beyond almost any other author. He is the Cobbett or the Defoe of the New Testament company. You need never misunderstand him ; it is almost impossible to misunderstand him except by thrusting meanings into his words which never entered his mind : and therefore, even if these verses stood alone, we might be quite sure that he meant the poor brother to be glad when he got rich, and the rich brother to be glad when he became poor.

But the verses do not stand alone ; they are connected both with the verses which go before them and the verses which come after them. He strikes his keynote directly he has uttered his brief cordial greeting. In his greeting he has wished the Christians of the Hebrew Dispersion joy—"Joy to you" (Chapter i. verse 1). But what a wish was that for men so miserable and oppressed, persecuted in every city, everywhere spoken against ! How could they hope for joy ? St. James teaches them (verse 2) : "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers trials," and then surely you, whose whole life is a trial, will never be at a loss for joy. True ; but how were they to find joy in pain and shame and loss ? This also St. James teaches them (verses 3, 4). Trial begets that patient and constant temper of the faithful soul which makes a man sound and perfect in character, lacking nothing. Trial is a furnace in which character is tested, purified, matured. And if, as they were bound to do, they made Christian perfection of character their first object,

preferring it far before happy external conditions, they would rejoice in any condition, or in any change of condition, which put character to the test and helped to make it perfect. Constancy in trial makes a man perfect, as in other ways, so also in this, that it fosters a single mind in him; it compels him to subordinate his lower cravings to the higher aspirations of the soul; it frees him from the distraction of divided and contending desires, from the doublemindedness—one mind tending to earth, the other to heaven—which cripples his energies and mars his service (verses 5—8). Once possessed of the firm patient temper which is bred by trial well endured, he is no longer “a man of two minds, unstable in all his ways.” But if trials have this happy effect on his character, may he not count it all joy when he falls into them? May he not well rejoice even in the largest reverses of fortune? If he be a poor man, and suddenly grow rich, here is a heavy trial which cannot fail to affect his character. If, when this test is applied, he retain a constant loyalty to Christ, will not this reverse of fortune have helped to make him perfect? If, on the other hand, he be a rich man, and is suddenly brought down to poverty, here is a test, a searching and decisive test, of character. Let him be patient now, amid his broken schemes and defeated hopes; let him sincerely rejoice in any change of condition which tests and fortifies his character; and is he not obviously becoming sound and perfect, approaching even that final perfection in which he will “lack nothing”? Holding perfection of spiritual character to be the highest good of man, St. James could honestly bid men rejoice in whatever changes and reverses tested, developed, matured the energies and graces of that character in them; he could honestly pronounce those the most “blessed” among men who endured temptation and rose through many trials to the crown of life.

So that this passage falls in with the whole scope of St. James's argument. With that argument in view, it becomes impossible to read this passage in any other than its plain literal sense. The poor man is to be glad when he is tried by riches, the rich man is to be glad when he is tried by poverty, since God so ordains and controls the trials of men as that all changes and reverses conduce to make them perfect and complete.

The ruling thought of these verses is, then, that great reverses of fortune are a test of Christian character, and that we ought to rejoice in them because they so test our character as to mature and perfect it. And I suppose no man will deny that great reverses are very searching and stringent tests. If you see a poor good man suddenly made rich, are you not a little afraid for him, though perhaps, in the same circumstances, you would have no fear for yourself? Do you not fear that he may lose his humility and spirituality of mind? that he will now mind earthly things? that he will indulge his senses? that his devotion to Christ may grow weaker now that he is bound to this world by ties so many and so pleasant? Are not these your fears, and have you not, in history and experience, only too good ground for them? On the other hand, if you see a rich "brother," who has been successful in business, and for many years has lived in prosperity and ease, suddenly reduced to comparative poverty, or even to absolute want; if he has to "begin life again" when the strength and sanguine hopefulness of youth are past, do you not fear for him? Do you not fear that his piety may prove to have been only an adjunct of his prosperity? that his patience may fail him? that he may grow sour, irritable, fretful? that he may fail to see the good in the evil that has befallen him? that he may confound misfortune with disgrace, and lose his self-respect because it has pleased God to bring him down?

The most searching test in these great reverses is not commonly their direct, but their indirect, action. A man may have so much goodness and good sense that a sudden access of fortune would make little difference to him if he were alone; and yet it may pierce and try him to the very heart because others are with him. He may have a vulgar wife, fond of show, or children who *will* give themselves airs, or friends who flatter and fawn upon him, or servants whose solemn deference gives him a new sense of importance; and by all these subtle constant influences his own standard of thought and duty may be insensibly changed, lowered, depraved. And the other man, the rich man become poor, may be affected in a similar manner. To a sensible and good man outward changes are of little moment save as they affect character and usefulness. How many a good fellow have we all known to whom the hard work and comparative poverty of a reduced income have been a positive relief, and who would have snapped his fingers at "Fortune and her wheel" had he had no one to care for but himself, or had those for whom he had to care been like-minded with himself. But if he has a wife who frets and storms, or children who sulk and quarrel, then his trial may become most penetrating and severe. Our worst troubles, our sharpest griefs, are not often where men place them. Many a man would be modest and humble in good fortune, or constant and cheerful under ill fortune, were those who are nearest to him of as Christian a heart as he. But when those to whom we look for example, for comfort, for sympathy, fail us—if parents are angry when we need their pity, or if children who ought to be our help become a burden—then we are poor and tried indeed.

Are we to rejoice in such trials as these? Yes, even in these, for these, too, test our character, and may help to make us perfect. St. James, indeed, speaks only of poverty and riches, but of course he includes under these terms whatever

other changes they involve. And if a man find his kind pleasant wife of former days changed into a fine lady by prosperity, or into a shrew by penury; if a woman find her once kind and brave husband turned into a fretful poltroon by misfortune, or into a lazy sensualist by wealth, these sorrowful changes are part of the reverses which have come upon them, these are among the consequences of having been "lifted up" or "brought low;" and in these also St. James bids us rejoice.

Now is it possible that any man should be sincerely glad to find himself penniless, for instance, with a wife and children about him whose prospects have been blighted, and whose tempers have been jarred into utter discord with his? Let us put the question in that plain practical way; for when the Lord Jesus bids us rejoice and be exceeding glad in tribulation and persecution, or St. James bids us count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations, there is a stately roll about the words, and so many sacred associations cluster round them, that they sound remote from our daily life; and it is here, in our daily life, that we want to know our duty and get help to do it. Well, conceive as miserable a case as you can. Suppose a man reduced from affluence when his best days are past. Plague him with a scolding wife, or a lazy ne'er-do-well son, or an ailing fretful daughter, or all three of these: let his work be uncertain and ill paid; in short, load him with whatever you yourself most dread: and when the full dismal burden is upon him, could you go to him and say, "Be of good courage, sir, and let thine heart be glad; for blessed is the man who endureth trial, since when he has been tested, he shall receive the crown of life"? You or I could not say that perhaps; we should have no heart to say it; but St. James says it plainly, heartily, and cheerfully. And to the poor souls who must bear the burden, which is the better comforter, you or I,

who can only be sorry for them, or St. James, who is not one whit sorry for them, and can teach them not to be sorry for themselves? Surely St. James is the better comforter.

But before we can honestly give or take his comfort, we must occupy his position, we must hold his convictions, we must rise to the full height of our stature in Christ. St. James held that this world would soon pass away, and we still sooner from the world, but that there is another world in which we must live for ever, and in which our lot will be shaped by our character even more decisively than it is here. The chief aim of every man was, therefore, or should be, to form in himself a character which would fit him for the eternal life. It mattered very little whether he was rich or poor in things which he must soon leave behind him: what was of infinite importance was, that the spirit, which had to live for ever, should become perfect and entire, lacking nothing. Whatever changes of circumstance contributed to raise, purify, complete the spiritual character of the man should therefore be most welcome to him. If poverty would test and mature it, welcome poverty; if wealth, welcome wealth. The whole visible world, with all its kingdoms and treasures, was of worth to him just in proportion as it served to form in him a strong and holy character. Knowledge, wisdom, righteousness, charity, and the like graces were the chief things of life; all else was valuable as it developed these, and became worthless and pernicious so soon as it hindered or thwarted them.

These were St. James's views of human life—views which he had learned from Christ Himself. And it is only when these views become our personal convictions that we can possibly attain that independence of outward conditions, that power of making all their changes subserve our true interests, which will enable the poor brother to rejoice that he is to be tested by wealth, and the rich brother that he is

to be tried by poverty. In short, we can only do what St. James bids us do when our religion becomes a sacred reality, pervading our whole life, governing every thought, passion, aspiration of the soul. To too many of us, alas ! our religion is like a stop in an organ, which we can pull out and shut off at our will. On Sunday mornings we pull it out, and for a time it discourses excellent music ; but we push it in on Sunday evenings, and use it no more till the week has run out. Religion is only the *Sunday* stop in the organ of our life. We are not of those—

“ With whom the melodies *abide*  
Of th’ everlasting chime ;  
Who carry music in their heart  
Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,  
Plying their tasks with busier feet  
Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat.”

And till we rise into a higher life, into a religious life more real and deep, more constant and pervading, we cannot hope to attain that large freedom of the spirit for which neither opulence nor penury has any bonds. We who are not masters of ourselves if markets fall, how can *we* rejoice when we are brought low ? If we would be lords of ourselves and of our fate, if we would be independent of outward conditions, if we would compel all changes and reverses to contribute to our good, we must learn to be in the world as Christ was in the world—in it, but not of it ; we must seek first that kingdom of God which is within us ; we must live as those who are to live for ever.

## XXV.

## The Story and Moral of a Blade of Grass.

ST. JAMES i. 10, 11.

ST. JAMES plays the historian or the fabulist in these verses, and narrates the sad end of a certain blade of grass. He warns the rich man that He will fade away "like *the blade of grass*;" and, in the Greek, throughout the warning, he uses the past or historical tense. His words should be rendered: "For the sun *arose* with a fiery heat, and *scorched up* the grass"—not, "the sun *rises* and *scorches up* the grass;" and the flower thereof *fell off*"—not, "*falleth*" or "*falls off*," "and the grace of its form *perished*"—not, "*perisheth*." Obviously he is narrating a past event; he is telling the story of a famous blade of grass which grew, and flourished, and withered away at some previous time or age.

In whose field, then, did this grass grow? The Commentators reply, In that of the prophet Isaiah. For James is here falling back on Old Testament words which would be quite familiar to the Jews for whom he wrote and would be sure to recur to their minds.

So that, before we can fully enter into the meaning of the Apostle, we must study the words of the Prophet. In fine, our theme naturally divides itself into (1) the story of the blade of grass, and (2) the moral of that story.

1. *The Story of the Blade of Grass.* We read in Isaiah

xl. 6—8: "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the Lord bloweth on them. Surely the people are grass. Grass withers, flowers fade; but the word of our God will stand for ever."

Now we can hardly listen to these words without becoming conscious of a certain tender beauty in them. It is not simply that their leading thought, the transitoriness of human life, is in itself full of pathos. The words seem to set themselves to a plaintive music, and the refrain—"Grass withers, flowers fade"—goes singing through our brain in mournful numbers, quickening our most pathetic memories of beauty blighted, wounded affection, the tender grace of days that are dead, the bright but broken promise of defeated hopes, the clear happy dawn of lives soon clouded in disastrous eclipse or quenched in the darkness of death. As we listen to the Prophet, imagination stirs and works. We *see* the broad pleasant field bathed in sunlight, fanned with sweet airs, thick with verdant grass, gay with the fragrant delicately-tinted wild flowers which clothe the grass as with the robes of a king. And then we see the fierce hot blast sweep across the field, under whose breath the grass withers, the flowers fade, and all that teeming life, all that exquisite and varied beauty, is swallowed up of death. Who does not feel at times that *that* is a true picture of human life? Who does not feel that the very moment we detach ourselves from the throng, and lift our thoughts to the height from which alone our life on earth can be truly seen, it is brief and frail and transitory? that the generations of men rise, and fall, and pass away just as the grass springs and withers, just as the flowers bloom and fade? And remembering how in *this* field every separate blade of grass and every fragile flower has its own little world of hopes and fears, joys and pains, who can fail to be saddened as he beholds them

withered by a breath, their early promise unfulfilled, their goodness not coming to its maturity?

Touching and beautiful in themselves, as an exquisite expression of a most pathetic fact, these words take new force so soon as we connect them with the circumstances in and for which they were spoken. The prophet Isaiah, whose main duty hitherto had been to denounce the judgments of God on the sins of Israel, to foretell that bitter captivity in Babylon which seemed the deathblow to all Hebrew hopes, now receives a new series of visions, and a new happier duty. The Eternal Spirit carries him on to that distant point of time at which the Jews will have reached the term of their captivity, and will start on their return, across the sands and through the passes, to their native land. He is to "speak comfortably" to them, to assure them that their iniquity is pardoned, their sin put away, that the years of their bondage are told and gone. As the Prophet broods over the vision, the silence is abruptly broken as by the voice of a trumpet—"Hark, a crier!" In the crier he recognizes the herald of the Great King. Another message of comfort has come to him from Heaven. And the message, delivered in the curt imperative tones of the herald, is, "Prepare ye a way for Jehovah in the wilderness. Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be raised, and every mountain be levelled; and let the rough places be made smooth, and the rock-ledges a plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh see it." This Divine proclamation teaches the prophet to look for the return of the exiled Jews under the form of a royal progress. The Great King, followed by his hosts, is about to cross the wilderness which lies between Babylon and Jerusalem. To prepare the way before Him and them, the valleys must be filled up, the rough difficult gorges be made smooth, rocks and hills be levelled with the plain.

When the royal highway is ready the King will come, his subjects in his train ; and there shall be so wonderful a display of the Divine Majesty that *all flesh* shall see it, even to the ends of the earth. In other words, whatever hindered or threatened to hinder the emancipation and return of the Jews from Babylon should be taken out of the way, and all the difficulties and perils of their passage through the desert be happily overcome.

The herald having delivered his message, there is once more silence in the Prophet's heart. But again the silence is broken, and he cries with deepening wonder, "Hark, a voice !" And now it is the voice of the Great King himself. It arrests the feet of the departing herald with the command, "Cry !"—*i.e.*, "*Proclaim.*" But the herald has discharged his commission ; he has no further proclamation to make. In his embarrassment he turns and asks, "What shall I cry ?" And the Divine Voice replies, "*All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field. Grass withers, flowers fade, when the breath of the Lord bloweth on them. Surely the people are grass. Grass withers, flowers fade ; but the word of our God will stand for ever.*"

The first proclamation had closed with the promise that the glory of the Lord should be so signally displayed that *all flesh* should see it,—*i.e.*, all the great heathen world. The second proclamation commences with, "*All flesh is grass ;*" the great heathen world, stable and imposing as it seemed, was transient—all its bravery would wither beneath the breath of the Lord, like the field of grass under the hot blast from the desert.

These surely were very "comfortable words" for the Jews. It could not fail to be a good tidings of great joy to them, to hear that the vast heathen empires, by which they had been so cruelly oppressed, were but as grass ; to hear that God so cared for them, a few thousand poor captives, that to deliver

them He would "blow upon" the massive and enormous kingdoms of the East, and cause them to wither away in his anger. In such a message as this they would exult and rejoice. But they must not forget that they, too, are men, that *their* life on the earth is brief, that *they* can only endure as they fashion themselves on the Word of God, which endureth for ever. And, therefore, the herald has to repeat and vary his message. "*All flesh* is grass"—all the great heathen races; but also "*this people*" is grass—a grass which withers like the rest. Like their neighbours, the Jews were in a constant flux, vexed by constant change. One generation came and another went. Their life, vexed with perpetual change while it lasted, was soon over and gone. Their only hope lay in obedience to the Divine Word, in appropriating that Word, in steeping their very life in it, till their life became enduring as the Word itself.

This, then, is the passage which St. James had in his mind when he told his story of a certain blade of grass that had been scorched by the heat of the sun till the flower thereof fell off, and the grace of its form perished. He was thinking of the field which Isaiah had depicted centuries ago, of the grass which grew in it, and had long since withered; of the mighty Babylonian Empire which his fathers held to be solid and enduring as the mountains, but which had now sunk into a mere heap of ruins; of the generation of his fathers who had returned to Jerusalem with joy upon their heads, to recommence a national life which was now fast drawing to a close. All these had passed away. They had withered like grass, faded like the flowers of the field. The place that had known them would know them no more for ever. And thus, by recalling the history of the past to his readers, the holy Apostle gave new force to his warning on the frailty of human life, the instability of human fortune.

2. Here, then, we come to the *Moral of this Story*. St. James is not content with a lesson so general as that which had contented Isaiah. He has a special and more definite purpose in telling the brief story which called up memories, historic and prophetic, from the past. As he had taken a single blade out of Isaiah's broad pasture, so he selects one man, or one class of men, for special warning.

The blade of grass reminds us that human life soon withers, that human fortune often withers even before the man dies. Yes; but it also reminds us that some men wither even while they retain the full vigour of life and their good fortune abides. "*The rich man withers in his ways*" before his health is touched, before his wealth is touched; and therefore, argues St. James, he should rejoice when his riches use their wings and fly away. The alternative the Apostle places before him is this: Let the wealth wither that the man may live, or let the man wither in the full abundance of his wealth.

'Tis a hard saying! But before we reject it as too hard for use, let us clearly understand what it means. St. James had just said, "Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is lifted up, but the rich in that he is brought low." The poor man is to be glad when he is tried by riches, and the rich man is to be glad when he is tried by poverty. Why? Because trial, and trial of the most searching kind, is good for every man—helps to make him perfect, prepares him to receive the crown of life (verses 2—4, 12). And as great reverses of fortune are among the severest tests of character, the Apostle would have the poor man welcome wealth and the rich man welcome poverty.

Now, however much we may dislike the injunction, or part of it, can we deny that it is based on a true, on a Christian, view of human life? Are not sudden and large reverses of circumstances severe and searching tests of

character? We may not fear riches for ourselves, but do we not fear them for our neighbour? If a poor good man suddenly become rich, is there not a danger that he will lose his humility of spirit, form self-indulgent habits, grow worldly in his aims? If he bear *this* test well, if he retain his humility, his temperance, his spirituality of mind, is he not capable of bearing almost any test? On the other hand, do we not fear poverty for ourselves and for our friends? If a good man, reduced from affluence to penury, is no more ashamed of his penury than he was proud of his affluence; if he is patient, content, cheerful, as, with failing strength, he addresses himself to new difficult toils, and can greet with a smile the swallow-flight of friends who loved him only for what he was "worth" to them—does not such a man bear a supreme testimony to the power and reality of religion? do we not account him well-nigh a perfect man?

So far as this, then, we must admit St. James to be right. Great reverses of fortune are a very searching and conclusive test of character. And can we expect a Christian teacher to bid us grieve over any reverse by which our character is tested, matured, perfected? In the Christian view of life, *character* is of supreme importance; circumstances are of value only as they serve to form and strengthen and purify it; for on the character we form our welfare here and hereafter depends. No doubt wealth is very pleasant if we can use it wisely, and poverty very unpleasant if we have not learned to bear it well and get the good of it. But what is infinitely better than either is that true manliness which makes us equal to either fate, that true godliness which leads us cheerfully to accept whatever helps to form a noble character, whatever strengthens us in virtue, in holiness, in charity. The wealth and the poverty will soon pass, but the character will remain, and will decide our destiny. Therefore it is that the Wise Man says, "Whatsoever is brought

on thee take cheerfully, and be patient when thou art brought to low estate ; for gold is tried in the fire, and acceptable men in the furnace of adversity." And, therefore, in precisely the same spirit, the inspired Apostle says, " Let the brother of low degree rejoice when he is lifted up out of his poverty ; but the rich when he is brought down from his wealth."

Do any say, " It may be easy enough for the poor man to be glad when he gets rich, but how is a rich man to rejoice when he becomes poor ? You ask too much of us." I reply, " You are not speaking, and you know you are not speaking, from the Christian point of view, in the spirit of Him who, when He was rich, for our sakes became poor. You are putting circumstances before character, the gains and pleasures of time before the services and joys of eternity. Nay, you are not even speaking from your own best selves, and your own highest point of view ; for the very men whom you most admire are not the men who put money first, or any kind of personal gain or pleasure, but the men who put God first, and duty and truth ; and the moments you most admire in their lives are precisely those in which they sacrificed their personal interests to the common good, and preferred the cause of truth and righteousness to all the kingdoms of the world. And what do you admire them for, save that you may imitate them ? "

But if you say, " Surely it is *very hard* to rejoice, to be honestly and sincerely glad, when loss and pain come upon us ! " what can any man reply but, " Yes, surely, it is very hard, so hard that we shall never do it, except as we possess ourselves of Christ's spirit. Heaven is very high ; how are we to reach it, save by climbing ? It is most difficult to raise these sinful natures of ours into the noble characters of immortality ; but does a difficult task grow easier because we shut our eyes on it, or if we neglect or postpone it ? "

St. James himself felt that in bidding the rich man rejoice when he is brought low, he was imposing a very searching test of character, a very heavy strain on virtue. And that, I suppose, is why he told his story of the blade of grass, to which at last we come back. What he meant I take to be this: You remember the prophet Isaiah's field of grass, how it withered beneath the scorching heat of the sun, so that the flower thereof fell off, and its graceful beauty perished. The rich man is often like a blade of that grass. The sun of prosperity shines upon him with a too fervent heat; all the beauty and nobility of his character fade under it. He withers away in his "ways," in the multitude of his schemes and pursuits. His fortune grows, but *the man* dies—dies before his time—dies before he ceases to breathe and traffic.

Is not that a true picture, and a sad one? All flesh is grass. We must all needs die; and, in some of its aspects, even that fact is sad enough. But it is sadder still that many of us should be as grass which wilfully exposes itself to a heat it might escape, and withers and dies while the field is still green and fragrant. Yet do we not all know men who give themselves to the mere making of money with a devotion so exclusive, that in very deed the man dies out of them long before they die; who violate conscience, neglect the duties and charities of home, put aside all that makes life fair, and graceful, and noble, repress their spiritual energies, and hardly give a thought to heaven till they have utterly unfitted themselves to enter it? As we watch them year by year, do we not see them growing more and more sordid, with a keener greed of gain, with fewer scruples as to how they get gain; their tasks and schemes so multiplying upon their hands, so incessantly occupying and taxing their brains, that they have no leisure for thought, for books, for art, and no relish for any but the most formal religion? Are these

spiritual creatures in training for an immortal life? Nay, they are rich men *withering away in their ways*.

The warning comes home to us in this age, as in few previous generations; for our whole life is so intense, our business is such a strenuous competition, we are solicited by so many schemes for our own advancement, or for the good of the town in which we dwell, or for the prosperity of the commonwealth of which we form part, that it is almost impossible to make leisure for thought, for quiet enjoyment of our gains, or for those religious meditations and exercises on which our spiritual health depends. We are literally "*withering away in our ways*"—so many are the paths we have to pursue, so rapid is the pace we must maintain, so scorching the atmosphere through which we move. And, therefore, whether we are rich, or are seeking riches, or are simply bent on a bare competence, we all need to take the warning which speaks to us *as unto men*—i.e., as to spiritual and immortal creatures, sons of God, and heirs of eternity. If we would not have the world, which holds us by so many and close bonds, crush all spiritual manhood out of us, we must resolutely set ourselves to be in the world as Christ was in the world. He neglected no duty, turned aside from no innocent pleasure, loved, when He could, to sit at feasts with friendly faces round Him and good fare on the board; and yet in all things He made it his meat and drink to do his Father's will. He was content and cheerful, even when He had not where to lay his head. He could refuse all the kingdoms of the world that He might worship God, and serve Him alone. He could rejoice even in his unparalleled sorrow for the joy set before Him—the joy of becoming perfect, even as his Father in heaven was perfect. May the mind that was in Him be also in us: for "*Grass withers, flowers fade; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*"

## XXVI.

## Christian Merriment.

St. JAMES v. 13.

“*IS any merry? let him sing psalms,*” says St. James. Is it, then, dangerous to be merry? Alas! we are so weak, so prone to evil, that there is absolutely no mood or posture of the soul which has not its peril. St. James does not say, or mean, that merry moods are more perilous than sad moods. He is just as careful to bid the afflicted pray as he is to bid the merry sing psalms. But he does mean and imply that the merry mood, like all other moods, has its dangers. And if we ask what that danger is, he still further implies that our merriment is apt to be non-religious, unspiritual, indevout. Hence he urges us to give our mirth a religious expression, to take it as the gift of the Divine goodness, and to give thanks for it. He teaches us that “if our heart be set to hallow all we find,” we shall hallow our merriment. Charles Lamb said that he, for one, was more disposed to give thanks before a fine picture, or over a fine poem, than when he sat down to a good dinner. In his delicate fanciful way he adds: “I want a form for setting out on a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem. Why have we none for books—those spiritual repasts—a grace before Milton, a grace before Shakespeare, a devotional service proper to be said before reading the ‘Fairy Queen’?” St. James was of his mind; he, too, thought it would be well that whatever touched the

spirit to its gayer or finer issues should be matter for devout thanksgiving.

But is the danger which he assumes a real danger? Are we apt to take our pleasures thanklessly, to be indevout when we are merry? We can hardly doubt it. We may not be of those who deem merriment unchristian and laughter a vice. We may be conscious that enjoyment and mirth often make us more devout, and impress the goodness of God more deeply on us than formal acts of worship. But are we not also conscious that at other times, when the fun grows a little "fast and furious," or when it springs mainly from the gratification of the senses, instead of rising into holy gratitude, we sink into unspiritual moods, and should regard the intrusion of religious thought and emotion as altogether out of keeping with the scene and the spirit of the hour?

Of course, I do not mean to say that we never take our pleasures religiously unless we have God *distinctly* in our thoughts, and express our mirth in formal words of praise. Without any distinct or immediate reference to Him, we may honour Him by taking his gifts with a thankful heart for a temperate enjoyment. We may prove ourselves under law to Him by shunning all excess, by shewing that we hate the sneer that wounds a neighbour, and find no wit in the jest that taints the spirit, or by studying to give others pleasure at our own expense. Lads in the cricket-field need not break out into psalms and hymns; they may prove themselves religious by their strict honour, their consideration for their playmates, their good temper under defeat, their readiness to give credit to their opponents. And men need not chant psalms over their wine, or quote Scripture when they relax, or say a prayer when they look at a beautiful picture, or find sermons in every stone, and pious books in every running brook, or be always conscious that the stars are for ever singing as they shine, "The hand that made us

is divine." They may be religious without that. By keeping their tastes simple, their tempers sweet, their hearts pure and tender and grateful, they may make their whole life a psalm of worship and praise.

They *may*, but *do* they? There is a fashion of speech just now, if not a fashion of thought, according to which it is wise of a man to "keep his religion to himself." "The less he talks about it," we are told, "the more piety he is likely to have. Let him worship God in the secrecies of his own heart, and not trouble his neighbour with it." It is a very perilous fashion, and a very selfish fashion. You *may* adopt it, indeed, and be a sincerely religious man; but if the prophets and apostles had followed it, where would your religion have been? Nay, where would it have been if all your neighbours were as reticent as you? Do you owe no duty to those who as yet have no love for God and truth? You who have been taught so much, are you never to teach? You to whom good words have so often been helpful, are you never to speak such words? And, after all, if a man loves anything very much, and is an adept in it, can he always refrain from speaking of it? Do men of business never talk of business when they meet? Do volunteers never open their lips about matches and drills? Do those who have a passion for music sit tongue-tied when symphonies and sonatas and glees and madrigals are the theme? Do housewives never discuss the mysteries, and the plagues, of the kitchen? Why, then, should religious persons alone be silent on that which engrosses their thoughts, which they love and venerate above all else? If they are so very careful to conceal their religion, and so successful in concealing it, may it not be because they have but little to conceal?

St. James's mode of *expressing* religion, of giving a voice to the spiritual and devout moods of the soul, may be an

antiquated and unfashionable mode ; but it is so good a mode that it might be well to bring it into vogue again.

*“Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”* Well, is it not natural to sing when we are merry? Do you not hear the children singing as they run about the house when the hours go happily with them? When you come home from business, and pull on your easy coat and slippers, and feel that you have a few pleasant hours before you, do you not instinctively hum a few notes, if you can’t do more, as you stroll through the passage or go up and down the stairs?

And if it is natural for men to sing when they are merry, is it not equally natural that good men should sing psalms? What is a good man but a man whose heart instinctively turns to God, whether in sorrow or in joy, who will be still praising Him whatever befalls? If you really love Him with all your heart, will you never praise Him with all your strength? If you feel that you owe your happiness, here and hereafter, to Him, your redemption from sin, your endeavour after holiness, your hope of immortality, will you never thank Him with a song—you, who instinctively sing when you are glad?

But on St. James’s lips the word “psalms” had a definite meaning; it meant the inspired psalms sung in the Temple and the Church, “the psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes” of which St. Paul speaks. Is it necessary that, when we are rightly and devoutly merry, we should vent our mirth in the songs of Scripture? It is not necessary; but is it not natural and comely? A man must have some words in which to express his gladness; and what words are more happily expressive of a devout gladness than the psalms of David and the hymns of the Christian Church? Our fathers were known, and scorned, as “canting psalm-singers,” so naturally and often did they betake themselves to the inspired songs.

So ancient is this custom of the Church that, eighteen centuries ago, the Roman pro-consul, Pliny, noted it as a feature of the Christians that *they sang hymns to Christ as God*.

If we ask for illustrations of St. James's injunction, that we may learn to obey it, there is no lack of illustrations even in the New Testament. Zacharias and Elisabeth, long childless, each of them breaks into a psalm when God makes them merry by giving them the son who was to go before the Lord and prepare his way. Mary, the mother of Jesus, made merry by the fulfilment of the national hope, gathers verses from the Psalter, adapts them to her use, and weaves a song of praise—the *Magnificat*—which the whole Church repeats to this day. So the devout Simeon, when he beholds “the Consolation of Israel,” soars into the *Nunc dimittis*, taking his “winged words” from the prophet Isaiah.

It is very true that before we can sing such psalms as these we must have a more exact and comprehensive knowledge of Scripture. But what is to hinder that? What sadder condemnation of ourselves can we pronounce than to admit that the words in which we know we have eternal life are unfamiliar to us? The Virgin Mary was a young girl, brought up in a village proverbial for its rudeness and rusticity. If she had the psalms of David in her heart, and could use them to express her spiritual moods, why should they not be at our command? The small pains we most of us take to know our Bibles is an evil sign. It is no wonder that we do not sing psalms when we are merry; for many of us know no psalms to sing.

“*Is any merry? let him sing psalms.*” We have psalms to sing, then. God, who gives us so much joy, has also given us the words in which to express our joy. And it may be reasonably doubted whether we owe Him devouter thanks for any of the holy men who were moved by the Holy Ghost

than for the psalmists, the singers of songs. At first, indeed, we should be tempted to think that, if any part of the Bible must go, it must not be the laws, the direct revelations of the Divine will, or the prophetic applications of truth to human conduct and duty, but the psalms. And yet, if we remembered that familiar saying, "I don't care who makes a people's laws, if I may make their songs," we might question whether the Psalms should not be the last thing to be parted with rather than the first. And the more we thought of it, the more the doubt would grow. For consider what is implied in God's speaking to us, and moving us to speak to Him, through psalms. In these spiritual songs He comes to us with music and poetry, and bids us praise Him in chiming verse and bright harmonious tones. Can the God who speaks to us in poetry and music be a harsh and austere Master? Can the God who bids us speak to Him in glad melodious numbers love to see us mortified and miserable? Must He not be friendly and well disposed towards us, if He can speak to us so brightly? Must He not love us, and wish us to be happy and merry, if He would have us speak so brightly to Him? It is impossible to conceive of God as coming to us in song, and asking us to sing songs to Him, and giving us the songs we are too dull or too sad to make for ourselves, and to believe that He is simply a severe Judge or an angry and austere Master.

If we value the psalmists for nothing else, let us value them for this—that they help us to see God as He is, as good and kind and joyful, and as taking pleasure in our kindness and joy. They teach us that God would have us come before Him "with a joyful noise" to "make melody before Him from our hearts," not to creep gloomily and forebodingly into his presence, and breathe out sighs and groans. They teach us that the nearer we come to God, and the more deeply we drink into his spirit, the more joyful we shall be.

If we judge David by his psalms, can we conclude that he thought religion was designed to make his pleasures less ? that he thought he honoured God by sinking into mournful and dejected moods ? It is very true that he has left us penitential psalms, but no music is complete without the minor chords ; and it surely is suggestive that “ he opens ” even his “ dark sayings *upon the harp*,” that he *sings*, rather than sobs out, his confessions of sin, his resolves to amend. Take the Psalter as a whole, too, and for every “ hearse-like air ” you will find a dozen “ cheerful carols ; ” for every mournful lament, a hundred ascriptions of praise. The psalmists are singers who can set even the sorrows of life to sweet music ; they are singers to whom life has far more joy than sorrow ; their hearts are sensitive to every touch of mirth.

“ *Is any merry ? let him sing psalms.* ” How can we but sing psalms when God Himself gives us psalms to sing ? If He is pleased to reveal Himself to us in music and verse we may well be joyful in Him, and respond in the verse and music He has taught us. He would not speak to us thus if He were not our Friend, and happy in being our Friend ; and if He is our Friend, is not that enough to make us victorious over all the ills of life ? If our Friend is happy, shall not we be happy too ? If you were to meet a neighbour who ran toward you chanting blithe words to blithe music, would you not conclude that he was merry, and wanted you to share his merriment ? And when God meets us with a song, what are we to conclude but that He is the happy God, and wants us to share his happiness ?

“ But our sins—our sins ! Are we not to mourn for our sins ? Can we be merry while we lie under the condemnation they have provoked ? ” Surely not : even if there were no future judgment, and no condemnation for sin except the being sinful, we could know no true joy while our sins were

unforgiven, unremoved. I do not understand how any man who appreciates spiritual facts and verities can be other than most miserable so long as—because he feels that he is not striving against sin—he knows that his sins are not forgiven. But why should they not be forgiven? Did not God send his Son to take them away? Are we to suppose that He cannot take them away? If He can, and if He came into the world for that express purpose, must He not want to take them away, and feel that his work is not complete till our sins are forgiven and removed? If we hate them, and want to be quit of them; if God hates them, and wants us to be quit of them, and is trying to remove them, what is to hinder them from going? The feeling which many good men have, that God is somehow reluctant to forgive them, that it is well-nigh beyond even his power to purge them from their iniquities, is contradicted by the whole scope of Scripture, by the whole life and mission of Christ. Why should the God against whom we had sinned speak to us at all, if He did not wish us to know Him for our Friend and to be reconciled to Him? Why should He send forth his Son to take away the sin of the world, if He did not wish to take away the sin of every man in the world?

Have you never, when you were children, sinned against the law of your parents, and gone about with a great heaviness in your hearts which clouded all your little world? And when you have been forgiven, if at first the joy was almost too great, if it forced tears from you rather than songs, have you not thereafter felt as though the whole world had grown new and bright to you, and gone about in it with a strange sense of purity and tenderness and goodness, and been ready to dance and laugh and sing at the faintest provocation? And when God forgives you, shall you not be glad? Will not your gladness demand a song?

*Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.*

## XXVII.

## Brotherly Love and Unity.

1 JOHN iv. 20.

A SEARCHING question this ; yet a somewhat questionable argument ! From the weight of emphasis laid upon it, St. John obviously intends it for an argument, and a cogent one ; you can tell from his tone that he is content with it, that he thinks it irrefragable, unanswerable : yet one is tempted to question, if not to reject, it. “How can I love the God whom I have not seen, if I do not love the brother whom I have seen !” we might say : “Why, it is just because I see my brother, and see too much of him, that I find it so hard to love him.” Or, again, we might say, “Not love my Father because I don’t love my brother ! Why, when I was a child at home, how I used to cuff, and scuffle, and contend with my brothers ; what keen pangs of rivalry and jealousy I have felt against them ; yet all that did not in any way impair my love for my father.” Or, taking a higher tone, we might say, “Not love the good perfect God, because I cannot love evil or imperfect men ! Why, it is precisely *that* in me which makes me love Him which also makes me withhold my love from them ; because I love and aspire after that which is perfect, I turn away from men to God.” In short, the argument looks so illogical that we may be tempted to conclude, “St. John was no logician. With the profoundest intuitive insight into all the mysteries

of Truth and Life, he had very little faculty for argument." But before we come to this conclusion, before at least we use it to ward off the heart-searching influence of the question St. John has asked us, let us remember that intuition is, at least in matters of affection, truer and safer than logic, that a conviction springing from the heart is better than the most faultless syllogism, that the very deepest truths are precisely those which cannot be proved by argument. You cannot, for instance, demonstrate your own existence or the existence of God; yet you know that you *are*, and that God *is*, and that these two are supreme ultimate facts. Try to prove them, and you will fail, as all have failed before you; there will be some weak point in your chain of argument, some assumption in your premises which will vitiate your conclusion. If, for example, you adopt the old philosophical argument, "*I think, therefore I am*," which looks safe enough, there are at least two weak dangerous points in it. For one inference from it is, that nothing exists save that which thinks, and thus while affirming your own existence you deny that of the whole material universe, which, perhaps, you did not intend. Moreover, you quietly assume that which you profess to prove: for the "*I*," the person, who thinks, is the very person whose existence you were to demonstrate; yet at the outset, in saying "*I think*," you take his existence to be granted; for how can he think if he does not already exist? Yet, though you cannot prove, you do not doubt, either your own existence or that of God. These are facts which appeal to that in you which is deeper than logic—to consciousness, to intuition; you know a great deal more than you can prove. And there are many cognate facts in the spiritual life which approve themselves to you, which you feel to be true, though you cannot demonstrate their truth. The longer we live, indeed, the less we trust in logic; the more we trust in the simple primitive inspirations

of the human heart. We find that logic has limits which are very soon reached, that its power is much slighter than we thought; we find both that the best things cannot be proved, and that to prove a thing ever so surely goes a very little way with men. Convinced against their will, they're of the same opinion still; you must touch will and heart, you must rouse the convictions and intuitions latent in and common to all men before you can win them to the love and obedience of the truth. Now it is to these deeps of our nature that St. John calls from the deeps of his nature when he asks, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love the God whom he hath not seen?" We know and feel that the thought is a true one, even though we may think the argumentative force of it somewhat defective.

But is it so defective as it seems? Let us take up the objections to it which I have suggested, and see what after all they are worth. *Is* it so much easier, for instance, and more natural to love the perfect God than to love imperfect men? It is for the perfect, no doubt. But we are imperfect; and to the imperfect, perfection is terrible, if also attractive; it is a standing rebuke to our weakness and defects: while, on the other hand, our sympathies *will* go out, do what we may, to those who are of like passions and imperfections with ourselves. Who does not love Abraham, though he shuffled and equivocated about Sarah, and was not altogether admirable in his treatment of Hagar and her son, better than irreproachable Isaac? David was by no means immaculate; yet he is dearer to us than prince Daniel, in whom no fault was found. Who does not love ardent blundering Peter all the more for his very faults? and is not even Thomas all the dearer to us because he was so sceptical and hard to convince? We cannot argue, therefore, that to love a perfect God is easier to us than to love imperfect men; for the sympathies of the imperfect are, and must be, with the imperfect.

Again. It may be very true that brothers treat brothers roughly ; but is it true that they can injure one another without lessening their love for their father ? What do you mean by love ? Does it not include obedience when it is felt toward a superior ? If boys do not obey their father—and what father does not wish his sons to love and serve one another ?—does not their disobedience detract from their love ? Well, this is part of the Apostle's argument. In the very next verse he tells us, " This commandment have we from God, That he who loveth God love his brother also." And if we do not keep his commandment, what proof have we that we love Him ? If we obey our Father, we shall love our brother : if we do not love our brother, we disobey our Father, and so far forth fail in love to *Him*.

The other objection has more in it, I confess. For it is often because we see so much, and too much, of our brother, that we find it hard to love him. We grow familiar with his excellences and blind to them—familiar with his faults and, according to the perverse law of our nature, *not* blind to these, but more alive to them. Still, this is our infirmity, and we know it. Should not the consciousness of our infirmity impel us to reverse the evil law of our nature, and to be to our brother's faults a little blind, and very kind to his excellences and virtues ?

Moreover, it is *our brother* whom we are to love—one who is in the image of his Father and ours. If we see so much of him, could we not contrive to see some traits of this likeness, and to love him for them ?

It is from our brother-men, too, and the various relations we sustain to them, that we gather our conception of our Father in heaven and of what He is. How, then, can we love Him unless we love them and such likeness to Him as they wear ?

And, again : what *is* love ? Is it an indolent complacent

enjoyment of what charms us ? or is it a sacred ennobling passion which is willing to sacrifice itself in order to benefit its object ? What is God's love ? Does it extend only to the perfect, and consist in a complacent contemplation of their excellences ? If it did, what hope were there for us ? But if his love embrace the imperfect in order that it may benefit them and lead them on to perfection, should not ours ? What is our love worth if it be not the love of God, *i.e.*, the love which is from Him and like his love ? What is it worth if it be not a passion as sacred, as self-sacrificing, as devoted to the good of the imperfect as his ; although we can only have it in our measure, according to our several capacity ?

The argument of the Apostle runs clear, then, however doubtful or questionable it may seem. We cannot love the Father whom we have not seen unless we love the brother whom we have seen—the brother whom God loves, and whom He bids us love with a love like his own.

But, now : If any man have this world's good, or indeed, the good of the heavenly world, and, seeing his brother have need, shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ? If any man say, " O yes, I love my brother, but I will not worship with him, nor come to the Lord's table with him, nor admit him to an equal share in all my rights in the Church, until he thinks exactly as I think and does precisely what I do,"—how much does *he* love his brother after all ? how dwelleth the love of God in *him* ? When a Christian says, " Though I have as little to do with him as possible, I love so and so *as a brother*, of course," he means—what *does* he mean by loving him as a brother ? Does he mean that he does not love him like a brother, but suspects him for a heretic who will not see obvious truths, or for a hypocrite who will not do his plain duty ? I am afraid that this is what, for the

most part, we mean by loving a man as a Christian brother : *i.e.*, we don't love him at all, but grudgingly concede to him just as much as we cannot withhold. Again, therefore, I ask, What would become of us if God loved us like that ?

Alas ! there are many signs that we have not outgrown the need of " the new commandment," that even yet we are not a law to ourselves, but need to be held in with bit and bridle lest we bite and devour one another. It would be pleasant to think that, though there was too much cause for the command, " Love one another," when St. John wrote—when Jew hated Gentile and Gentile Jew, when Sect hated Sect in the Church and out of it, when Pharisee would have no more dealings with Sadducee than Hebrew with Samaritan, nor he who said, " I am of Cephas," with him who was " of Paul " than the Circumcision with the Uncircumcision—yet now this new commandment, being nineteen centuries old, had well-nigh done its work. But how can we think it has ? There are more sects in the Christian church now than when John was a prisoner for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. There are more sects—is there less distrust, and suspicion, and bitterness between them ? Try to unite them, if you care to know. Nay, as if it were not shame enough to have so many militant sects, even the members of any one of these cannot be at peace among themselves—will not worship together or commune together ; every man must have everything exactly to his mind, even every whim or pique or preference must be gratified, or, careless of the common good, he will fling off from the Church in which he has been bred. Again I say, If God loved us as we love one another, if God loved his Church as we love the Church, and shewed his love as we shew it—flinging off from us every time we did not think exactly as He thinks, or failed to do his will—what were before us but the prospect of endless confusion rushing down to eternal darkness and loss ?

But are there no signs of hope and promise? Do no tendencies toward unity reveal themselves amid all these disruptions and separations? I cannot deny that there are such tendencies and signs; nay, if we have much faith in the public talk of public men, we may well think that the happy millenium of catholic charity cannot be far off now. For twenty years at least, over all dinner-tables and upon all platforms, we have heard the graceful effusions which have caused us to hope. Conformist, at such times, can see no reason why he should not embrace Nonconformist, nor Baptist why he should not be one with the Pædobaptist. But though we have gone on so long "loving one another in word and in tongue," the lion has not yet lain down with the lamb nor the leopard with the kid. If the love of the tongue has been also a love "in truth," the love "in word" has not yet become a love "in deed." We all of us hope that we love the God whom we have not seen; nevertheless it does somehow happen that we do not love the brothers whom we have seen—at least we love them only "*as brothers*," and not enough to unite with them and worship with them. We are still waiting till we are all of one mind, which we never shall be, and follow one rule of life, which we never shall do; no, not in heaven itself: for even there there are many mansions, though all are parts of one house; even in the heavenly garden the trees yield fruit of every sort, though all are trees of righteousness.

And why, at least here, should we wish all our brothers to be of one mind—that is, *of the same mind with us*, for that is what we mean? Are we infallible, and are all our humble penitent confessions of ignorance a lie? Why should we wish them to do exactly as we do, when our conceptions of duty are still imperfect and in much mistaken? Do we not need each other? Might we not learn of each other? If we are brethren, what right has one brother to dictate to

another, or to exclude any whom the Father acknowledges to be members of his family, whom even we ourselves confess to be of the family, though we are very careful to keep them at arm's length? Is not the true unity that of different members of one body, all unlike, yet all one, each having its own proper function, but each needing the rest, and all instinct with one life—the whole body, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, growing according to the vital working in the measure of every individual part, till we all come, through this very unity of faith and service, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ? True unity does not exist between things similar and alike, but between things dissimilar and unlike. There is no unity, as Robertson has said, in a heap of sand, though every grain of it is exactly like the other: take away a handful, and it is still a heap of sand. There is no unity in a flock of sheep, though no one but the shepherd could distinguish any one of them from any other: take away five or fifty of them, and there is still a flock of sheep. But the unlike and dissimilar members of the physical body compose a vital unity: take away one of these, pluck out an eye or cut off an arm, and the unity of the body is impaired, every member suffers with the suffering member, and the body is never again complete. So with a family. Subtract any one member of it, though these may all be of different ages or sexes, and the family unity is broken; you have created a void that cannot be filled. So far, therefore, from wishing all our Christian brethren to be alike, or refusing fellowship with them until they are exactly what we are and do as we do, we should remember that one and the selfsame Spirit has diversities of operations and confers a large variety of gifts for this express purpose—"the perfecting of the saints," the establishment of a true vital unity; that we

cannot afford, therefore, to dispense with any gift possessed by any brother, that we need him even as he also needs us ; and that we sin against the unity which God has designed, and against that charity which is the fundamental law of the Divine life and kingdom, so often as we cut ourselves off from any of our brethren, however unlike us they may be. If we do not love the brother whom we have seen, *any* brother, and cannot work and worship with him, we need no other proof that we do not love the Father whom we have not seen, or do not love Him as we should.

## XXVIII.

## The Crown of Life.—A Dream.

REVELATION ii. 12.

IT became my duty a little while since to attend a clerical meeting which was to extend over a few days. During the session, in the intervals of business, I heard a good deal of a class of men who have of late grown largely in numbers and notoriety. I mean that order of irregular preachers who are in the habit of standing up in our streets and market-places to narrate the history of their own conversion, and to urge upon all who pass by a Gospel which to them is still very new and wonderful. My prepossessions were certainly not in their favour. I had thought of them, as I still think of many among them, as illiterate and vulgar men, who teach when they have great need to learn, as noisy dealers in damnation, who clothe bad doctrine in bad grammar, who sin against every rule of modesty and good taste, and who owe no little of their popularity to their loud voices and their impudent reckless tongues. Naturally, therefore, I was much impressed on hearing from some of my brethren, on whose sound judgment I rely, that they had met with men of this class possessed of very happy gifts of utterance, and animated by a sincerity and charity the more admirable because, not being the results of culture, they could only spring from gracious hearts. My brethren told me many stories, one provoking another as stories will, of what this man or that

had said, citing strokes of humour and pathos so touching or so genuine, as to indicate great natural genius inspired by a hearty love of the truth. Most of these stories require to be *told*, and told by one who is a master of action and gesture, and of the subtleties or grotesqueries of our provincial dialects. All I can say of them here is that, if at times they made us smile, the smile was close neighbour to tears, their very humour being almost always of a pathetic cast. I am very glad I heard these stories: they have helped me to think more justly of a class of men whom I was disposed to regard as, in many cases at least, sorry bigots who, uncalled, had thrust themselves into a work for which they were utterly incompetent. It is pleasant to know that many of them are good men, who are doing a good work, to which they have been called both by their natural gifts and by the grace of God.

The train which brought me home stopped for an hour or two at Boston. As I had nothing better to do, I resolved to while away my time by renewing my acquaintance with Boston Stump. Do you know what the Boston Stump is? It is simply the square lofty tower of a fine old Church, which lifts itself so high above the Lincolnshire flats that it is visible for many miles over land and sea. It is of a grandeur and beauty so appropriate to its position that one thinks of it as having *grown* out of the earth rather than as having been piled upon it. Now as I passed round the market-place to reach the Church, I came upon a group of perhaps a hundred people, who were gathered before the rostrum of an auctioneer, and were listening to him with more attention than the pulpit commonly commands. To an idle visitor a crowd, however small, is always attractive; and almost involuntarily, drawn, I suppose, by the sympathy man has with man, I joined myself to the little crowd in the Boston market-place. From the large business point of view the

occasion was a very trivial one. The auctioneer had nothing to offer for sale but common household pots and pans, and wooden tables and chairs of the very humblest description. The largest offer for any single lot did not go beyond a pound. Nevertheless I was greatly interested, and held my place for well-nigh an hour; for, to my mind, there is something strangely moving and pathetic in the sight of such poor household goods, so worthless to many of us, and yet so dear and familiar to those who have been compelled to part with them. As I looked on, I could not keep myself from speculating on the past history of the various chattels offered for sale. I felt that every chair and table had its own story to tell, if only I could read it. I thought of the time when each of them was first carried home in triumph, of the joy with which some poor family had greeted it, of the splendour which it wore in their eyes, of the many friendly services it had rendered, of the domestic scenes it had witnessed, of the bitter grief occasioned by the breaking up of the home it had helped to furnish. That new costly furniture should be sold and bought seems natural enough; but that these poor battered articles should be set up in the sunshine, which makes them look twice as mean as they are, and that even these should be held to be valuable acquisitions by some in the crowd: this surely is a thought not without a homely pathos.

Nor was it without a similar interest and some similar speculations that I watched the faces of the bidders and buyers. The eagerness with which some of them tried to secure this morsel of furniture or that; the hope which shone in their eyes when the auctioneer paused as though about to knock it down to them; the blank disappointment that fell upon them when the bidding was resumed and went a few pence beyond their poor means: the anxious second scrutiny through which a chair, for instance, was subjected so soon as it was handed over to its purchaser; to see him

handle its joints, turn it upside down, sound it against the pavement, sit down in it, and the evident pleasure with which he came to the conclusion that it was as good as, or better than, it looked, and a great bargain: all these and the like were points of interest and touches of nature which I would not willingly have missed. It was pretty, too, to see a certain lad and lass, for they were little more, who were evidently about to commence housekeeping for themselves, and were making their first ventures in such a scene. Their purse was as light as their hearts, and they could not therefore buy much; but the anxiety with which they discussed what they should try for, their pleasure in securing what they wished to have, their bashful blushing reception of various appropriate jests and compliments paid them by the crowd, were not only "as good as a play," but a great deal better than any play I ever saw.

Still, the person who struck me most was the auctioneer himself. Evidently so poor as to be little better off than his customers, he was as evidently a man whom melancholy had marked for her own. The painful tension of certain lines in his face, the distant and remote look in his eyes, the listless mechanical way in which he discharged his functions, the plaintive tones of his voice, all told their story plainly enough, and proclaimed him a man worn and buffeted with some inward grief. Some of his tones, especially when he repeated his constant refrain, "Going for a mere song, a mere song, a mere song," fairly haunted my ear, his voice lingered on them so wearily and sadly. As I resumed my journey and travelled home I caught myself again and again repeating the words, and trying to catch the plaintive cadence in which he had uttered them. The very rattle of the train set itself to a minor chord, and kept singing, "Going for a mere song, for a mere song, for a mere song!"

And when I got home I dreamed a dream in which the

anecdotes I had heard at our meeting and the scenes I had witnessed in the market-place were blended together in the strangest fashion,—a dream so strange, so alien to my usual habits of thought, that I will tell you what it was.

In my dream, then, I found myself once more at Boston station, with an hour or two to spare before my train was due. Once more I resolved to walk into the town and revisit the beautiful Church. As I turned over the bridge there, sure enough, was the market-place, but how changed from its familiar aspect! The grand tower of the Church now stood in the very centre of the market, instead of being hidden away in one corner of it. The broad spacious place, instead of being dotted with a little knot of people here and there, was now swarming with a vast crowd; and right under the Stump, far above the heads of the crowd, stood the auctioneer, no longer mournful and depressed, but with a rapt earnestness of manner and a joy kindling in his face which made a wholly new man of him. Yet he was still at the work at which I had left him that morning, still holding an auction and asking for bids. For a moment or two I was so struck with the change in the man and in all about him that I had no ear for his words. But judge of my intense astonishment when, so soon as I had sufficiently collected myself to listen, I heard him say,—

“The next thing I have to offer to you is ‘the Crown of Life!’”

“Oh,” I thought, “the man’s gone mad, or else we are all mad together.” But as he repeated, in the familiar cadence, though it had now passed into the major key, “The Crown of Life! the Crown of Life! the Crown of Life!” I resolved at least to see what method his madness would take. “Here it is!” he cried, holding one hand high in the air. Now, as he so confidently said, “Here it is,” I looked with all my eyes—with all my heart too;

but whether it was that I was not prepared for so great a sight, or that I was too far off, I could see nothing. None the less it was very obvious that he held, or thought he held, something in his hand ; for, as he stretched out his arm, his eyes were fixed with a kind of rapture on that which I could not discern, and when he drew down his arm he kept turning this invisible object, this "sightless substance," between his palms as though he would exhibit all its beauties. "Here it is," he cried, "all of pure solid gold, of gold so pure that no breath can dim, no rust corrupt it. Ah, how its jewels flash and sparkle in the light! They have caught their lustre from the Sun of Righteousness, and will shine, as it shines, for ever and ever. With this on your heads you may walk through the thickest darkness of sorrow and perplexity, and never miss your way. Wear this, and it will make a clear day about you in the gloomiest night. Here it is! all of pure gold, set with jewels of an immortal lustre ; and it is going, going, going, for a mere song! Going, going, going, for a mere song, for a mere song, for a mere song! Who will bid for it? You may all have it for the asking. A prayer will buy it—nay, even a wish, so that it be pure and strong. It fits all heads, and burdens none. And you may *all* have it, if you will. *You* may have it, and yet your neighbour may have it none the less. The more of you have it, the brighter it will shine. You may give it away, and by giving it away make it twofold more your own. Who bids, who bids, who bids? Here is the Crown of Life going for a mere prayer, for a mere prayer, for a mere prayer! Will none of you bid? Ah, thank you, sir, and you, ma'am, and you. Going, going, going. *Gone*. *Gone* to you, and to you, and to you."

Here for a little while there was a pause, while the auctioneer passed something to his attendants, and they to certain persons in the crowd ; but what it was I could not see,

though now—perhaps because my eyes were growing accustomed to the scene, I did fancy that I caught faint gleams of light passing through the throng, and settling here and there. The little bustle over, there fell a deep expectant silence on the multitude, and all the white faces flashed round towards the strange being who towered above them. As for him, after standing for a few instants gazing on his audience with a countenance all pity and concern, new fervours seemed to kindle within him, and, abruptly breaking the solemn silence, he went on,—

“ And yet, see—oh, the wonder of it, the wonder of it !—it is gone, but nevertheless it is here. I still have it in my hands, and may offer it to you once more. Perhaps some of you did not believe I really meant to part with it. Perhaps some of you did not know how much it is worth. Some of you, perhaps, thought it worth more than you could pay. Never mind, I will put it up again. Here it is—the Crown of Life. It is all of solid gold, the only gold that takes no tarnish. It is all set with priceless gems that turn darkness into day. The very moment you put it on, it will quicken you to a new and happier life : so long as you wear it, it will keep you bright and merry whatever may befall ; and what other crown will do that ? Are you blind ? It will give you sight. Are you deaf ? It will unstop your ears. Are you dumb ? It will fill your mouth with songs. Are you lame ? It will make you leap like the hart. Are you sick or weak ? It will make you sound and strong. Are you of a sorrowful spirit ? It will give you joy for mourning. Are you dead in sin ? It will make you righteous and give you life. Who bids for this precious, this wonderful crown ? Who bids ? who bids ? who bids ? What, you, sir, and you, and you ! Ah, thank God, thank God ! Why, you are *all* bidding ! every man of you reaching forth to the crown ! Hand them down, hand them down, hand them down. Nay, you need

not do that; for, see, they are already there! Look you, friends, as I lift this crown to my head, let each of you turn and look his brother in the face."

And sure enough as they turned to look, there shone on every head—even on mine—a radiant crown. I could see them well enough now. The whole air was filled with an intolerable splendour. The vast multitude broke with one heart and one voice into a psalm so loud, so joyous, so unrestrained, that I awoke; and, alas, it was only a dream.

I wish I could have held my dream a moment longer, if only that I might have told you, with certainty, what psalm they sang. But I am pretty sure it was that which St. John heard from the spirits of just men made perfect. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour, and glory, and power; for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God with Thy blood, *and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth.*"

ALL END

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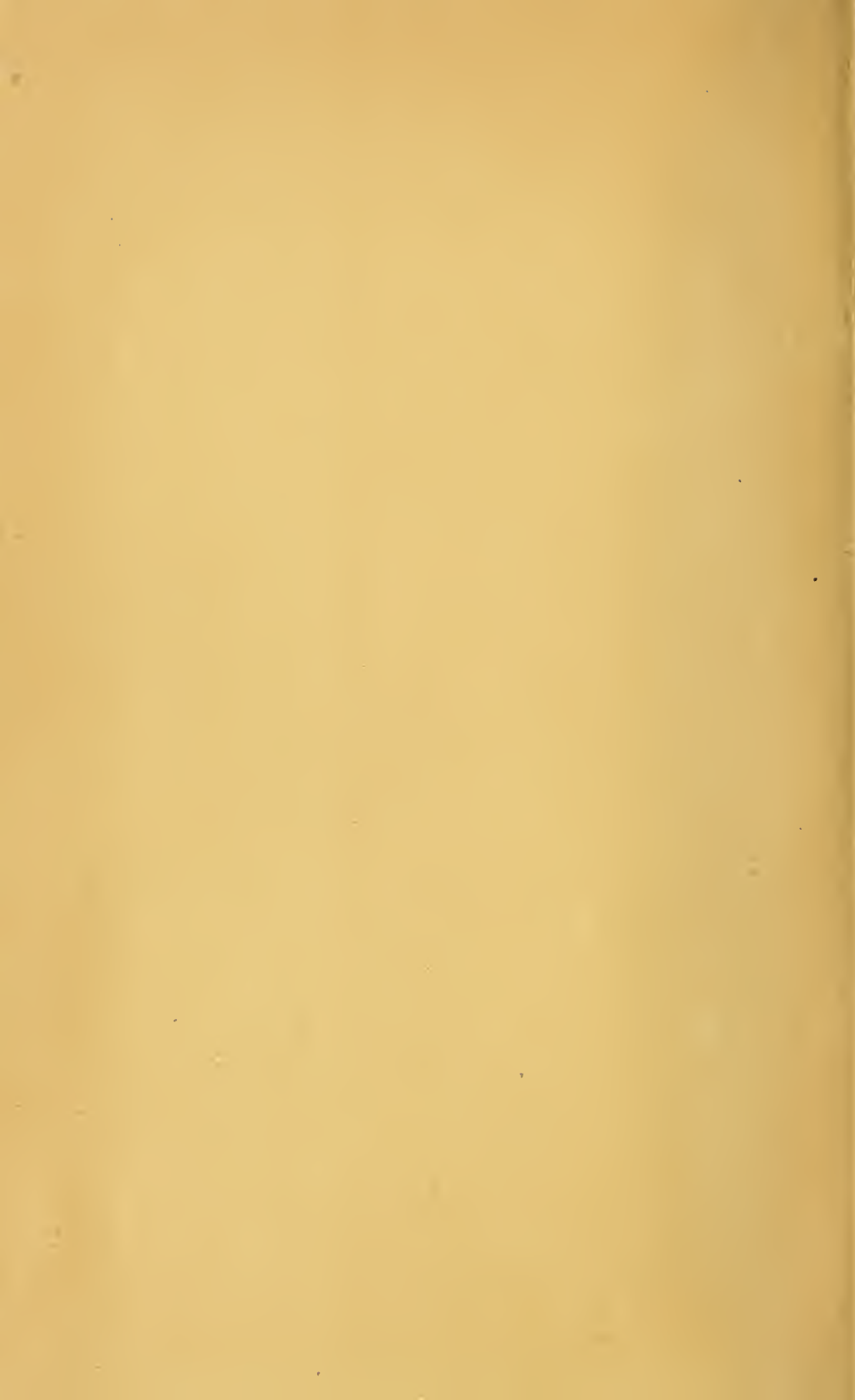
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